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END PAPERS

END PAPERS

*ADVENTURES AMONG IDEAS AND
PERSONALITIES*

BY
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Preface

THIS book does not require an introduction, as the collection of papers represent the sort of things that have interested the writer during the past few years and the sort of thoughts that occurred to him about them. They originally appeared under the general title of "End Papers" in the pages of *To-Day*, and are reprinted by courtesy of the Editor of that periodical. They are called "End Papers" because they were placed at the end of each number, and because "end paper" is a technical term associated with books.

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Other People's Plans

IF you take the world as you see it, which is not the world as it is, and imagine it as you would remould it had you your heart's desire, which will never be, you would be puzzled as to your next step. For we live in uncertainty ; with all our knowledge we are the least informed of the species. We are here, and we know not why, and to-morrow we shall be hence, and we know not whither. Philosophy gives us no fuller advices of these profundities. Nor can philosophy guarantee our continued joy in that which we achieve. But, despite the preacher, all is not vanity and vexation of spirit. We carry within us the joy of the ages, past, present, and to come, and we remould our world nearer to our heart's desire every time we become conscious of our spiritual possessions. Often as

not this remoulding is accidental, always it is evanescent—but what of that? Deeply, powerfully, really to have lived, if but for one moment, is to have tasted eternity. That the taste thereof disappeareth as quickly as that of the too hastily swallowed lollipop which left the child bewildered between laughter and tears, argues nothing. So the joys of life leave us—so life itself may leave us in the end, bewildered whether we are bereaved or no, but we shall roll the flavour of it on our tongues for ever.

But in spite of the riot of uncertainty, which is also one of the joys of life, philosophers have never ceased their search for a plan by which individuals or groups may guide themselves into certainty of achievement or bliss, or whatever end in life they may consider desirable or appropriate. Looking at the miscellaneous collection of plans designed by the philosophers down the ages—the theories called religions, scientific, ethical or artistic—one marvels at human belief in its own powers. Surely this faith

in a discoverable plan has some basis in ultimate reality ! And yet, why should it ? Perhaps a plan is nothing more than an illusion—one of the illusions, maybe the master-illusion, by reason of which we are human. What if we wake up one of these mornings with the realization that plans are a figment of time with no relationship whatever with eternity ? It would not be surprising, for all plans are finally scrapped, and in one man's lifetime adjustments are effected in the world of ideas so that there is an observable difference in intellectual conceptions and values between the cradle and the crematorium. For myself I do not mind : life may be a bother, but it is great fun, and if I have no plan of my own, I am extraordinarily interested in the plans of others—so long as no one insists upon my adopting any single one of them. I am an amateur of ideas, and for that reason can enjoy the desire of others for the moon without fear of contagion or envy.

Adventure among philosophic and religious

ideas is not without peril : for one thing there is always the danger of conversion, and, for another, and perhaps more imminent, there is the peril of righteous indignation. Strategy is necessary. You, for example, must be wary of, say, Christian Science when suffering from toothache, for should you fall under an obligation to that remedy you may become its slave. It is not a question of efficacy ; your genuine amateur of ideas will grant all that ; you want to keep your freedom. The argument would be the same were the remedy opium or cocaine. It is as easy and as dangerous to drug yourself with hashish or alcohol as with philosophy or religion. When toying with these explosives it is advisable to have correctives at hand. Thus when flirting with Nietzsche you lean on St. Paul ; when rounding-up Philistines with Matthew Arnold you wear the *Idylls of the King* next your heart ; should you get within range of a Platonic *barrage* of abstractions you take cover in your Einsteinian dug-out ; when

inclined to conceit at your Darwinian conformity you checkmate with humility before the ascendant possibilities of Lamarck ; Hegel cures you of Kant, and Schopenhauer of both ; tempted to set up as a creator with Bergson you dose yourself with the destructiveness of Bakunin or Sorel ; when Swift makes you feel insanely vermiform turn to Max Stirner or Plotinus, who will exalt you above yourself, or Whitman, who will leave you where you are ; and when Democritus threatens to make you happy about everything, turn to Epicurus, who will make you melancholy about nothing.

This may be thought a short way, and, therefore, an unkind way with the philosophers, but I assure you it is neither. The attitude is neither one of contempt nor of mere negation. It is defensive, that is all ; a line of philosophic defence designed to yield backward or press forward according to intellectual necessity in the battle of life—for that battle is most intense not in the engagement for bread, as materialists would

have us believe, but in those sorties which maintain the outposts of the spirit.

All philosophies are wrong and right, that is the first and only principle of my philosophy, my nearest approach to dogma. You, as it were, pay your money and take your choice, remembering always that *ubi bene, ibi patria*, is truer of an idea than a country. It is an attitude, however, that imposes upon the amateur a certain external austerity ; joy, as I have hinted, and as a good many have more than hinted before me, is within (a good place for it, as fire within the stove), but there is no veto on outward heat. Properly worn, this armour of the Lord generates power as it scares mugwumps with no feeling deeper than their pockets, and no seeing further than their noses, and those worse than mugwumps—the Jabberwocks of ideas who hitch their wagons to the latest “movement,” and stab the darkling hour with an *ism* under the impression that they are striking a light.

Life is greatest when it is not too soft.

When, indeed, you are not too soft. Some sort of hardness is essential ; and you must add to your life a cutting-edge, which can only be done if you are steel-true. The more sensitive and impressionable you are the more this will be necessary if you are to escape false trails and scattered forces. Analyse the great spirit—that which moves, compels, attracts, and uplifts—and you will find that it always possesses, in addition to other and more special qualities, impenetrability and brightness, the two qualities of hardness—the hardness of steel and the light of diamonds. And as with powerful persons—so with you and me.

The moral should now be plain : Collect ideas, but never mix them. There are some which are your own and some which belong to others. Those which belong to you are already yours, and have been yours from the dawn of you ; they only await development ; and because they are yours in very truth they have more chance of being universal, for you are life, not a part thereof. As

Gilbert Murray has again reminded us, the enemy is within us and about us, "He who puts always the body before the spirit, the dead before the living . . . who makes things only in order to sell them. . . . The Philistine, the vulgarian, the Great Sophist, the passer of base coin for true, he is all about us and, worse, he has his outposts inside us, persecuting our peace, spoiling our sight, confusing our values, making a man's self seem greater than the race and the present thing more important than the eternal."

True he tells us that escape may be found in the calm world of the written word, but only where the "great things of the human spirit still shine like stars pointing Man's way onward to the great triumph or the great tragedy, and even the little things, the beloved and tender and funny and familiar things, beckon across gulfs of death and change with a magic poignancy, the old things that our dead leaders and forefathers loved, *viva adhuc et desiderio pulciora*.

September, 1918.

The Pursuit of Life

EVERYBODY wants fullness of life : those who are willing to sacrifice all that is most alluring in this life for the hope of a better life to come equally with the spendthrift majority who care not for the future so long as the hour be filled. None despise life. Even the ascetic and the puritan for all their negations are not denying but seeking life. They are allowing the temptations of the moment to pass them by because, rightly or wrongly, they believe them to be barren. Such folk actually demand more of life than the less calculating. The voluptuousness of puritanism has never received full recognition. But all, as I say, want life and the fullness thereof ; we are all in love with life above all other things, and in the long run all our creeds and dogmas, our

gospels and our ethical systems are efforts towards a universal solution of the eternal question—What shall we do to be saved? In other words—How can we live longer and more joyfully here or hereafter.

We want life, and again life, and more and more and more life. So much are we in love with life that the great founders of religion have always held out hopes of life to come as compensation for the parsimonious helping at this presumably initial banquet of living. The prophets offer life as the reward of death—on terms. Christianity, eternal life; Buddhism, an eternity of lives. Both mean the same thing; both recognize that the supreme pursuit of humanity is life. Both, above all, seek to show how we may so order our days as to earn the right to live more perfectly hereafter.

But my aim is not to discuss doctrine. No religious formula has embraced all mankind; groups are as inevitable as individuality within the group. But rising above co-ordinated ideas there are always coming

forward new thoughts and experiences which alter our relationship to the past and force us to readjust our lives in the present. Thus it has come about that vast numbers of people to-day find themselves questioning the validity of old ideas of life without being able to formulate or to accept new ones. And in spite of all the changes that have come about in our time and all the material advantages we possess over our predecessors, there is, perhaps, more uncertainty and fretfulness to-day than ever there was.

The world has pulled away much of its traditional scaffolding and it is not quite certain whether it can stand alone, so that we are now faced with the spectacle of an age denying the past and rescinding its denials almost in the same breath. People who dashed into the open are taking cover again—those who desired freedom and took it are repenting. But there is no need for alarm. Our world is not unlike the farm-yard in Andersen's fairy tale, where there was so much noise that everybody thought

something was going to happen : but nothing was going to happen. We have made mistakes before, and will make them again. Whatever is, is ; whatever can be, will be. There is no cause for repining, no urgency for recantation. On the contrary, there is every cause for rejoicing, for we have won the battle of personal freedom and all we have left to do is to live.

But how to live—ay, there's the rub ! It is no use crying for more life, as Richard Jefferies did, or of re-emphasising the belief, as Thoreau was fond of doing, that there is more day to dawn, the world being yet a morning star. We should all like more life, that is what we are here for, and in our happier moments we believe that there is ever so much more day to dawn. But vague transcendentalism is no means to that end at best it is no more than a pious wish, at worst just one of those substitutes for life whose embrace weds us to illusion. Not that one would underestimate illusion. Illusion is three-parts of life as life is at

present understood. You may rob a man of almost anything with impunity except his illusions. Let us have a care, then, how we tamper with such precious things. We must cling to something or someone, "little bewildered ghosts" that we are; so, until we achieve reality, let us hold on to the illusory whether we imagine it to be what is or what is not in things or persons. Perhaps, who knows, if we are faithful enough to our illusions they may come true.

At the same time we have got to hold on to something more solid. Not facts, they are often more insubstantial than dreams, but the things, be they facts or figments, which give substance to our days. The day that is to dawn may break at any moment for those who are awake. And if we cannot live "according to plan," because plans, the most carefully devised of them, as we know, "gang aft agley," we can find out a mode of life which bears the fruit of satisfaction. At the present peculiar moment in history the mode is not to dash about either

in talk or deed, but to work apart, from within outwardly, at your nearest preferred task, and do it well. All the, what Americans would call, "worth-while" philosophies and religions resolve themselves into doing a job of work well without hope of extraneous reward. The reward is in the job. If there is any hope for the new life which is reputedly dawning now, it will be found in the belief, the old, old belief, that whatever is worth doing is worth doing well. Sweeping a crossing and writing an epic are one in this equality of endeavour which may yet save the world. It is a portable belief possessing the inestimable advantage of inclusiveness, and anybody can adopt it at any time.

Taking the Sting out of Death

MOST people console themselves for the shortness of human life by faith in immortality of one kind or another. Life after death is a universal panacea. Mr. Bernard Shaw, in his efficient way, is also dissatisfied with mortality. But he is not to be put off with the prophets' paradise to come any more than old Omar was. The resemblance to Omar Khayyám, however, ends here, for Bernard Shaw is notoriously disinclined to make the best of a bad job. The Epicurean doctrine of eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow you die, which, when you come to think of it, is not so very far removed from the Christian—"take no thought of the morrow," has no charms for him. On the contrary, such a philosophy,

in his view, is simply asking for trouble. To eat, drink and be merry is to make death inevitable and leave immortality in all its old uncertainty of tenure. In *Back to Methuselah* he advocates progressive longevity by an evolutionary process of development through the satisfaction of desires. The scaffolding is Lamarckian, but the structure is *bona fide* Shaw. The clarity of vision, reinforced by logical audacity and moved by a supersensitive distaste for pain and dirt, untidiness and waste, is the same as that which has placed the Shavian plays and prefaces among the most memorable of modern writings, and made the Shavian personality the most persistent of modern myths.

If it were possible, or for that matter, necessary, for Bernard Shaw to apologize for his life and work, this book might well be his *apologia*. But Shaw does not apologize, he explains. He has raised explanation to an art by making it an end in itself. The Preface to *Back to Methuselah* perpetuates

this faculty and brings the explanatory Shaviana up to date. The process which he calls weeding the Garden of Eden, began with his "dramatic parable of Creative Evolution," *Man and Superman*. It is completed in *Methuselah*, and in the concluding paragraph of an eighty-page-long introduction, the combined thought of his own increasing years and the vastness of his theme bring him nearer to actual apology than he has hitherto reached. "My sands are running out," he says ; "the exuberance of 1901 has aged into the garrulity of 1920 ; and the war has been a stern intimation that the matter is not one to be trifled with. I abandon the legend of Don Juan with its erotic associations,* and go back to the legend of the Garden of Eden. I exploit the eternal interest of the philosopher's stone which

* Mr. Shaw remarked a little while ago in the hearing of the present writer—"I am shocked at the way the younger generation are doing the things I have been advising people to do for the past twenty-five years !" Was this the fatal Shavian "brilliance" or —recantation ?

enables men to live for ever. I am not, I hope, under more illusion than is humanly inevitable as to the crudity of this my beginning of a Bible for Creative Evolution. I am doing the best I can at my age. My powers are waning ; but so much the better for those who found me unbearably brilliant when I was in my prime. It is my hope that a hundred apter and more elegant parables by younger hands will soon leave mine as far behind as the religious pictures of the fifteenth century left behind the first attempt of the early Christians at iconography."

Death, of course, is a nuisance—and so is life, in certain circumstances. But we do not desire to limit life for that reason. We should therefore be careful how we tamper with death. Bernard Shaw realizes that life is too short for the accomplishment of ordinary reforms, let alone any great and fundamental change in human habits or desires. We are born babies, and remain children, though we live to be centenarians.

Three score and ten or, even, if you prefer it, four score and ten or five score years, are scarcely long enough for an apprenticeship to the art of living. We simply muddle through our days, reacting from known stimuli and resenting fearfully the unknown and the experimental. The result is chaos, waste, suspicion, ignorance, fanaticism, conspiracy, self-seeking, profiteering, and war. "History," says Shaw, "records very little in the way of mental activity on the part of the mass of mankind except a series of stampedes from affirmative errors into negative ones and back again." He demands a new religion—"A new Reformation," in which constant growth by the satisfaction of real needs shall supplant the crude modern faith in the survival of the fittest. Following Bergson, he calls his new religion Creative Evolution, and through it he demands the physical conquest of death. *Back to Methuselah* is sent forth as the first metabiological step towards the Bible of the New Reformation which has for its object

not consolation prizes of immortality and a good time hereafter for the pains and penalties of being alive now, but the extension of corporeal existence illimitably.

This fascinating and somewhat terrifying idea is expounded with unimpaired Shavian wit and intellectual drive. It completes, without, I hope, concluding the cycle of Bernard Shaw's ideas. The ages are reviewed and Shavianized in five plays dating from the Garden of Eden, through our own time (where there appears a desolating caricature of Mr. Lloyd George), in varying stages to thirty thousand years hence—"As Far as Thought Can Reach." In that remote age, death only occurs as an accident; birth has become so decent that it can be represented on the stage in the form of the hatching of a great egg from which a "full-fledged" human being appears. Our ideas of babyhood have long since become outmoded. Creativeness is no longer accidental. Mankind has become self-creative as well as oviparous—and babies are as extinct as

dodos. The conquest of death involves the conquest of life. If you live for ever you learn all sorts of tricks which are far too difficult and complex to learn under our existing schooling of brief years.

It is all very logical, but not very consoling. No one doubts that sooner or later mankind may discover a means of prolonging life beyond present limits ; indeed, the idea is so attractive that it might be sufficient to encourage thought towards its realization, without endeavouring to anticipate how we should employ our fortune of added years. Making plans for the future is a perilous hobby, and a Shavian futurity has so many terrors of efficiency and puritanism as to make death a happy standby. I can imagine revolutionaries in the year thirty thousand harking back to John Keats and calling death "soft names in many a soothed rhyme," or invoking the spirit of Walt Whitman in the hope of recapturing the fine careless rapture which inspired him to chant :—

*Come lovely and soothing Death,
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving, arriving,
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,
Sooner or later delicate Death.
Prais'd be thy fathomless universe,
For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge curious,
And for love, sweet love—but praise! O praise!
praise! praise!
For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding Death!*

If Whitman makes a virtue of the inevitable, Shaw turns the inevitable into a vice. He refuses to compromise with death, but the terms of his physical immortality include the eradication of man as we know him and the elimination of carnal desires, and, ultimately, of the flesh which causes them. Which, in your private ear, dear reader, is not, properly speaking, Back to Methuselah, but Back to Buddha!

September, 1921.

Big in Little

THE idea of littleness is strangely confused, what is little in one sense being a term of reproach, and in another a term of endearment. You may not be little in spirit, for instance, if you value the esteem of your fellows ; but to be little in size, especially if you are a woman, is to attract interest and affection, and even, it is said, though you be little and a man you win the esteem of all big women—and yourself. But even this form of littleness has its limitations : you must not go too far, or you become a mere curiosity meet only for Barnum's or such-like exhibitions of abnormality.

Yet there is a phase of the love of littleness which is free from littleness of the objectionable kind : it is the growing tendency of small groups of people to fend for them-

selves against the never-ending audacity of what is merely big and powerful. Politically this tendency has always existed. Little nations have persisted in the conviction that they have a right to live in their own way ; and do we not believe that the biggest war was fought for them ? Nor can we do other than believe that such a policy was right, for most wars have been due to one or the other of two causes : the desire of ambitious little nations to be bigger, and the desire of ambitious big nations to be bigger still. And, if you think it out, it is more than likely that you will come to the conclusion that many of the other troubles of the world spring from the same cause : the desire to be bigger rather than better than someone else.

I have been encouraged much of late by the development of the tendency towards littleness in the realms of books, pictures, and the theatre. Here " the blessedness of being little " was never more necessary or more justifiable. As modern commerce develops and gets a firmer grip upon all

things, including art, the little citadels of personal variety and excellence will be needed not only to give joy to the few who like such things, but to provide a jumping-off place for new ideas.

Things begin by being little ; some are not destined for growth in popularity or utility, and they remain little ; but other little things, appealing at first only to the few, are often the forerunners of great waves of popularity ; anticipations of the universal. The Christians were at one time a despised and bullied little sect, who insisted on practising what they preached until their faith conquered half the world. To-day all the nations of the earth who consider themselves civilized also call themselves Christians. Let us not then despise things with little beginnings. But if littleness in the big sense can be justified at all, it must be justified on grounds of littleness, and not in the hope that it will grow big.*

* The Little Theatre movement, for instance, is either good or bad as a Little Theatre movement and

We need this movement towards that which is most excellent in the smallest space. The life that is really full has no room for lots of things, let alone big things, and it is so intent upon its own inner riches that it rarely yearns for what everybody's seeing, buying or doing. The good little things are "big with eternity." They supply that intimacy with thought, ideas, emotions, and character which is necessary to fine living. The Little Movement is a sort of intensive culture of the soul. You cannot communicate subtle sentiments or rare thoughts in a vast auditorium. A little theatre is needed where

not as a potential big theatre movement. The "Little Gallery" and the "21 Gallery" in the Adelphi are either desirable or undesirable as little galleries and not as embryonic Burlington Houses. Little journals like Mr. Gordon Craig's *The Marionette*, which comes from Florence, Miss Margaret Anderson's *Little Review*, Miss Harriet Monroe's *Poetry*, Mr. Sheldon Cheney's *Theatre Arts Magazine*, which come from America, and Mr. Holbrook Jackson's *To-Day*, justify their existence in direct ratio to their capacity to be fearlessly and successfully little rather than to grow up into portly big-sellers.

space and distance do not track the essences of expression to their doom. And it is the same with exhibitions of goods useful or otherwise, for man does not live by useful things alone. Pictures are not precisely useful pieces of goods, but they add to the happiness of not a few people for all that. It is a curious fact that the most desirable pictures avoid the big galleries: they are rarely seen at the Royal Academy: they could not survive the corpulence of that venerable institution. The little pictures that say intimate things in tones that are either too strange or too subtle for average perception, slip into the little galleries, where they await adoption by those who will love them in little houses, or the friendly little rooms which redeem all big houses from desolation.

After all, the need of such little things is no more than a further expression of friendship. It is all very well, and very proper, to feel "kindly unto all the earth," to love nations or families, but the real test of

friendship is exclusiveness. A little friendship of the real quality is more satisfying than a populous camaraderie. The truth of the old saying *multum in parvo* has survived the ravages of familiarity, and out of the ashes and flames of a megalomaniac world this hoariest of platitudes rises phoenix-like, proclaiming that a truth is none the less true because it has been patronized with the lip-service of a hundred generations. Much in little—one might fall into a dream upon such a thought, for it harbours eternity.

The desire for bigness as an end in itself is a characteristic of all over-ripe civilizations. It is a characteristic of ours. It is at its worst when it seeks, as it always does, growth by standardization. All big things necessarily end in uniformity, and however necessary uniformity may be to the mass, it is death to the individual. Standardization is the militarization of things, and the extent to which a human being can be standardized is the extent to which he can

be dehumanized. The ants and the bees do the uniform trick far better than men.

In shops the big thing does not find its most insufferable expression in the departmental store, but in the standardized "multiple" shop. At one time the shopping streets of every town differed from each other in variety of good and bad taste ; character and eccentricity played their parts in shop fronts, traders' signs, name boards, decorations and so on. But the charm which comes from this variety is gone. The shopping streets of our towns hardly differ from one another. The "multiple" shop has condemned them to uniformity, standardized them into dullness. Boots and butter, tea and tobacco, medicine and margarine, books, clothing, washing materials and a hundred other things are set forth behind standardized shop fronts, displayed in windows arranged on a standard plan, and sold by standardized salesmen who tell you standardized stories about the standardized goods which their standardized limited

company employs them to sell at a standardized wage. It is all very horrible and all very successful. It is the environment of the mass, what Daisy Ashford called the "mere people"—mass production for the masses ; but necessary and inevitable, since we have the masses.

The tentacles of the octopus of big finance are everywhere. Everything is being standardized. All the individuality is being squeezed out of life. Civilization is being run according to plan. Efficiency is taking the place of character. The vast machine of modernity is devouring its creator. Personality is becoming a lost art. It has already passed from the English stage and Press ; our theatres and newspapers are nearly all run on multiple shop principles. It is rapidly passing from our hostelrys. At one time it was not difficult to find an "old-fashioned" inn capable and comfortably managed by its owner who was proud of himself, his reputation, and his customers. Very soon such hostelrys will be as extinct

as the " non-tied " tavern ; they all will have been absorbed into trusts and given that institutional turn which is inseparable from the trust-owned hotel. It is only a matter of time when all places of entertainment and refreshment will be as alike as two tea-shops. Mass production has invaded every walk of life, and we are all in danger of being branded like herded cattle.

Is there a remedy? No, there is not. Standardization is inevitable. It is the only way of providing for the masses, and, in the main, they prefer it. In a herd distinction is bad manners. This is not a sneer, it is a statement of fact. The herd, the masses, the common people, democracy, the public, or whatever you like to call it, has its own laws, tastes, habits and instincts. These must be expressed, and they best express themselves by uniformity of thought and bearing, and standardization of things. The control of this uniformity and standardization is most easily manipulated by big concentrations of money in trusts and combines.

Where there is no vision the combines flourish. Those who do not share the taste of the masses must look after themselves, not by fighting, opposing or objecting to democracy, but by refusing to be crushed by it. Those who do not share the passion for bigness must not lend themselves to it.

The man who believes in big things is lost. Even belief in the bigness of the world is an illusion. We only believe in a big world because we cannot comprehend it. In the last resort the world is no more than one man's comprehension of his more intimate surroundings; and in the final issue of all, one's surroundings resolve themselves into a single separate soul, and the quality of its thoughts and feelings and imagination. A single separate soul may appear to be a little thing in itself, if we could measure it, but that also is illusion; there is really no such thing as a single separate soul; the phrase has only a relative value. Every soul is related to every other soul and one with the moving forces of life. Thought,

feeling and imagination are the lines of communication. To possess these is to possess great riches. A little thought can fill immensity ; a little feeling can unlock the heart of life, and, as William Blake said : " The world of imagination is the world of eternity."

Whatever stimulates or awakens these faculties stimulates and awakens life. But it will be found that all such awakenings spring from little things. We are only superficially moved by the big demonstration, the big theatre, because essential life is not on the surface and it responds only to a subtle appeal. " The poets," said George Meredith, " who spring imagination with a word or a phrase, paint lasting pictures." What, indeed, do we remember of all the epics and plays but a few lines, a character or so, a thought ? But those little impressions and memories are as deep as life. Art teaches us that concentration, not expansion, is the mode of life.

September, 1920.

Illusion in History

WHEN Mr. Pope asserted in one of the most familiar of his numerous familiar lines that the proper study of mankind was man, he was talking philosophically. But that need not disturb us, for he was stating no more than the truth—if only the bare truth. I would go even a little further than the bard. I would go so far as to say that no other study affords such variety of interest or is capable of rewarding us with so many opportunities for surprise. And it also happens that man is the most accessible of all objects of study. He is as numerous as he is widespread, as free as he is various. You need ask no one for permission to examine him, and should you need help in your deliberations, a thousand novelists, philosophers, historians,

moralists, poets, scientists and theologians are ready to offer as many and more theories and explanations of the acts and arts, the blunders and achievements, the dreams, passions, hopes, aims, virtues, and crimes of this most versatile of species.

But it is better to form your own opinion or be amused in your own way, so, although you will not despise the proffered help of the professional observer and interpreter, you will use it rather than let it use you. Fortunately any point is a good starting place for this agreeable study, and it is as well not to be too exclusive. The foundations of the art must be, as in drawing, the living model, who may be either yourself or others. But the field is so wide and life so short that sooner or later you must turn to the records of humanity which have been gathered together in books, and among books few have quite the same value for this purpose as the more direct and naïve of biographies and biographical dictionaries, especially the latter, if they are old.

You need perspective when recording the truth even more than when delineating more tangible ideas or objects ; and to tell the truth about man the perspective which time alone can give is indispensable. Truth is not stranger than fiction until it becomes fiction, as it always does in the long run, and man is as unrecognizable until he becomes a myth as history is unreliable until it is legendary. Novels are truer to life than histories, which may be the reason why all readable histories approximate to fiction. Historic facts are of little value until they become symbolical.

It is becoming more and more necessary for us to realize these interesting and peculiar phenomena of human records at a time, such as the present, when history, as we are so often reminded, is being "made" before our eyes and ears. Many of us are not a little disturbed by the infinite variety of so-called authentic accounts of the origins, prosecution, and conclusions of the late war. One by one the supermen whose genius

has turned Europe into a chaos of impoverished, morbidly self-conscious and hysterical States are telling the world how it was done and how all the mistakes were made by someone else.

These documents, and those other even more ponderous "authorized" and "official" records issued by the Departments of State of the various nations who were drawn into the maelstrom are the raw material for the historical artists of the future. What would one not give to read what our Gibbons and Macaulays of the year A.D. 2022 evolve out of this mass of diplomatic, acrimonious, romantic material; this falsely-frank and frankly-false medley! We cannot tell—we may not know. But unless human consciousness undergoes surprising progress during the next hundred years towards the establishment of a more exact sense of fact, the dear old war will have become as mythical as the Arthurian legends, its incidents as picturesque and as true as Alfred and the cakes or Canute and the waves.

In the second of his letters on *The Study and Use of History*, Lord Bolingbroke, after pointing out that nature gave us curiosity to excite the industry of our minds, and not as an end in itself, goes on to say that the proper application of this faculty is the constant improvement of private and public virtue. "An application to any study, that tends neither directly nor indirectly to make us better men and better citizens," he adds, "is at best but a specious and ingenious sort of idleness, to use an expression of Tillotson: and the knowledge we acquire by it is a creditable kind of ignorance, nothing more. This creditable kind of ignorance is, in my opinion, the whole benefit which the generality of men, even of the most learned, reap from the study of history; and yet the study of history seems to me, of all other, the most proper to train us up to private and public virtue."

These are wise words, but there is more than one obstacle in the way of their application to that practice of private and public

virtue which my Lord, Viscount Bolingbroke, so rightly upholds, but in the practice of which he was not always so scrupulous. In the first place the study of history can only be pursued on the understanding that history as it is written is indistinguishable from legend, and that no one would read it if it were not. "A mixture of lie doth ever add to pleasure. Doth any man doubt that if there were taken from men's minds vain opinions, flattering hopes, imaginations as one would, and the like, but it would leave the minds of a number of men poor shrunken things, full of melancholy and indisposition, and unpleasing to themselves?" Thus, Lord Bacon: The answer is, yes, it would, and quite rightly so, too. If we are to make a proper study of mankind we must start with the illusions of mankind, and not with what science would call the facts. We shall never understand mankind's more recent efforts at chaos-making unless we recognize the importance of the things men are prepared to believe. There never was a better

opportunity for such a study as the present moment, or such excellent raw material as the post-war explanations of our supermen. But these will be of no permanent value until someone connotes and annotates them with the popular Press of the period. The Press is the real master of illusion ; the war books are the aftermath.

September, 1922.

Patriotism for Kings

" *The time has come,*" the Walrus said,
" *To talk of many things,*
Of ships and seas and sealing-wax,
Of cabbages and kings. . . ."

LEWIS CARROLL.

I CHOOSE the last, not necessarily because it is the most interesting or even the most important of the fascinating subjects named by Lewis Carroll, but because I happen to have been re-reading Viscount Bolingbroke's *Letters on the Spirit of Patriotism and on the Idea of a Patriot King*. These letters, first authoritatively published in 1749, after serving the dual purpose of helping to consolidate the House of Hanover, and to reinstate their author in court and political favour, have achieved a reincarnation. They mean something to-day after their one hundred and fifty years' oblivion.

Patriotism and kingship are once again in the melting-pot ; not this time in the interests of sectarian enthusiasms and ambitions such as the Protestant Succession—men are engaged once more in killing each other for . . . well, speaking generally, because they are frightened of one another. Kings, on the whole, are coming out of the maelstrom rather the worse for the experience—with the notable exception of the King of this country, whose reputation for good-heartedness and patriotism increases. No one will claim that King George was popular when he came to the throne ; he was not unpopular, far from it ; he was unknown—perhaps unknowable ; and to this handicap was added the further disadvantage of having to follow a king whose outstanding gift was the faculty of appearing well and impressively in public.

King Edward was well known—his personality attracted and pervaded the common mind. He was the apotheosis of popular taste ; he did the sort of things which most

people would like to do if they had the opportunity. The millions who lived drab and narrow lives took heart from the knowledge that their king was having a good time. They liked to call to mind his spacious luxury, to picture him with slightly tilted silk hat, big cigar, and, above all, they liked, as the familiar song had it, to "mark his merry eye." In fine, they enjoyed a "good time" by proxy—and were content. King Edward had other qualities, some of them admirable, but those were subsidiary: he impressed by his genial personality. He symbolized the popular idea of life.

Such a king did not make things easy for his successor. It is never easy to follow a "personality," because personality, like acting, is ephemeral—it creates and bequeaths nothing more tangible than an atmosphere. The result is that whatever and whoever succeeds it is in the nature of an anti-climax, and anti-climaxes, however surprising or even amusing, may be, as unconverted readers of Bernard Shaw's plays

are aware, disconcerting and irritating. George V was an anti-climax to Edward VII. The ten merry Edwardian years were a monarchical tonic; interest in the throne was stimulated to an abnormal pitch; the decade was like an anecdote with an untimely end. King George could not continue in the same key. He was different. He was less English and more English. Less, if the Englishman is the "good old sport" type, and more, if the Englishman is the quiet-living, home-loving citizen.

We often hear of the "silent public"—it is the section that the noisiest newspapers patronize at election times. But the appeal rarely gets "over," because it is the class which is least affected by "stunts" and unmoved by "movements." It is neither upper, lower, nor middling among classes, but pervades them all. It is the class which gets on with its job; and just as it may be said that this class represents the nation, so it may be said that King George represents this class. Its members always approved

him ; they now like him, and one day they may love him. I had written *will* love him, but that is too much to prophesy in these mobile times. The permanence of the monarchy in a plutocracy such as ours depends upon the sort of things done by the sort of men who capture political power. If, in a certain stress of eventuality, they do not recover rapidly enough from their latest error (for government is largely the adjustment of errors) the flood-gates will burst, and kings and supermen will be swamped by the resentment of the underman—as in France in 1789, and Russia in 1916.

Reading through the old essays of Bolingbroke again, such reflections as the foregoing are inevitably started, and one's knowledge of King George, such as it is, for we know little about our kings at any time, inspires one to fit him into the ideal of a Patriot King. Looking backwards at his public record one may note him approximating to the type imagined by the man who supported the Pretender, recanted, and revenged him-

self upon the Hanoverian, who pardoned him, by setting up a kingly ideal for a more or less free people, ruled by a more or less foreign dynasty. Everything King George does is a contribution to the patriotic idea. In some instances he has gone even farther on the road towards patriotism than was prescribed by Bolingbroke ; he has endeavoured to rule by example, and his examples have been good because they have sought to preserve the national voluntary principle—which would not come within Bolingbroke's system if that system were logically established. But a wise ordering of social life sets a limit to mere logic.

The “ Patriotic ” essays of Bolingbroke contain the clearest and most eloquent enunciation of what may be called the English idea of a monarchy, and, as the principle of monarchy is being questioned in many quarters, the republication of the essays is opportune.* Discussing the idea of Divine

* A new edition of Viscount Bolingbroke's *Letters on the spirit of Patriotism and the Idea of a Patriot King*

Right, Bolingbroke is under no illusions. Divine right for him means the Divine right to govern well. "A divine right to govern ill is an absurdity : to affect it is blasphemy. A people may choose, or hereditary succession may raise, a bad prince to the throne ; but a good king alone can derive his right from God. The reason is plain : good government alone can be in the Divine intention. God has made us to desire happiness ; He has made our happiness dependent on society ; and the happiness of society dependent on good or bad government. His intention, therefore, was, that

had just then been issued by Mr. Humfrey Milford at the Clarendon Press. The first edition of this famous book was surreptitiously printed with his own illicit alterations, by Alexander Pope, but never published. The copies, 1500 in number, were held by the printer awaiting Pope's instructions. These instructions were never given owing to the poet's death, upon which Bolingbroke seized the copies and destroyed them "in one common fire." Some few copies did get into circulation, but only one is now known to be extant and that is in the safe keeping of the British Museum. The authorized version was issued anonymously by Millar in 1749.

government should be good." Such are Bolingbroke's words, and they are sufficiently inspiring, yet how they should make us tremble for our governors ! But perhaps government, like man in Pope's belief, "never is, but always to be blest." The facts support such a theory, and although I am disposed to believe with Bolingbroke himself that a Patriot King is "the most uncommon of phenomena in the physical or moral world," I am equally convinced that there is more chance of our getting one by chance than choice, that is if we can form any opinion from a glance round the benches in the House of Commons. For the time being we are saved by the Constitution which our fathers bequeathed from the terrors and responsibilities of such a choice.

There are two things, however, unforeseen by Bolingbroke, when he wrote these admirable essays, which are still so sound in principle, and they are so paradoxical that we can excuse him for having overlooked them. They are the curious facts that

neither kings nor governments govern—modern government is a series of compromises between interests and necessities expedited by the sleepless and energetic nagging of the Press.

Certain newspapers would, I think, find such idealism as Bolingbroke sets forth in the following passage far from their tastes : “ As soon as corruption ceases to be an expedient of government, and it will cease to be such as soon as a PATRIOT KING is raised to the throne, the panacea is applied ; the spirit of the constitution revives of course : and, as fast as it revives, the orders and forms of the constitution are restored to their primitive integrity, and become what they were intended to be, real barriers against arbitrary power, not blinds nor masks under which tyranny may lie concealed. Depravation of manners exposed the constitution to ruin ; reformation will secure it. Men decline easily from virtue ; for there is a devil too in the political system, a constant tempter at hand : a PATRIOT

KING will want neither power nor inclination to cast out this devil, to make the temptation cease, and to deliver his subjects if not from the guilt, yet from the consequence of their fall. Under him, they will not only cease to do evil, but learn to do well ; for, by rendering public virtue and real capacity the sole means of acquiring any degree of power or profit in the State, he will set the passions of their hearts on the side of liberty and good government. A PATRIOT KING is the most powerful of all reformers ; for he is himself a sort of standing miracle, so rarely seen and so little understood that the sure effects of his appearance will be admiration and love in every honest breast, confusion and terror to every guilty conscience, but submission and resignation in all. A new people will seem to arise with a new king. Innumerable metamorphoses, like those which poets feign, will happen in every deed : and, while men are conscious that they are the same individuals, the difference of their sentiments will almost

persuade them that they are changed into different beings." The day is gone when we may hope for, or even desire, "submission and resignation in all"; long years of discontent are upon us, and the Patriot King or Patriot Statesman who could restore confidence would indeed be a "standing miracle"—but miracles do happen.

March, 1918.

The Irony of Lytton Strachey

ARE the urbanities returning? Is the war really over? I ask because there are portents. Max Beerbohm is at length coming into his inheritance of appreciation. His last two books, which are as good as his first two issued over twenty years ago, have probably sold more copies in six months than the earlier ones sold in as many years. Why? Max, I say, is no better; how could he be? He was "the incomparable Max" in the 'nineties, he is incomparable now.* But that is not all. Norman

* When Mr. Bernard Shaw decided, for reasons of health, to resign from his position as dramatic critic of the *Saturday Review*, he announced his successor, Mr. Max Beerbohm, in a "Valedictory," which appeared in that journal for May 21, 1898. "The younger generation," wrote Mr. Shaw, "is knocking at the door; and as I open it there steps spritely in the incomparable

Douglas has come into his own. *Old Calabria* has been reissued, and *South Wind* is a success. And last but, more than usually, not least, there is Lytton Strachey.

With Mr. Lytton Strachey biography throws off the heavy mantle it has worn for so many years and dances forth in garb of lighter and more graceful cut. Not that he is light in the frivolous sense, still less in the superficial. Mr. Strachey is serious and profound, but he does not consider it necessary to be ponderous on that account. He is urbane and well mannered—but never “superior” or “brilliant.” His sparkle is inherent, his opinion implied, his analysis inobvious. You have to read, not so much between the lines, as beneath the words.

Max.” The phrase has become current and will remain so despite Mr. Beerbohm’s repudiation of it in a letter to Mr. Bohun Lynch and included by him in *Max Beerbohm in Perspective* (1921). “Years ago,” says Max, “G.B.S., in a light-hearted moment, called me ‘the incomparable.’ Note that I am *not* incomparable.” As a matter of fact no one is, but, at the same time, there is only one Max.

He does not use language to disguise thought ; he uses language to guard expression, and whilst he is far from difficult, or even diffident, he who reads as he runs is in danger of missing Mr. Strachey's best points.

A trite interpretation of his subtle art of character delineation would mark him for a master of expository analysis. It might even go so far as to exaggerate his obvious malice into love of revelations for their own sake. The studies of Manning, Florence Nightingale, and General Gordon, in *Eminent Victorians*, are likely subjects for such an argument. But interpretation of the kind would be misleading. The delicate craftsmanship of this master of ironic statement is constructive. Analytical as he is, Mr. Strachey's studies are synthetic in aim and accomplishment. He shows you how the wheels go round and you could not have a better instructor ; but all the time he is leading you up to the revelation of a complete character which, once known, lives in the imagination with the reality which

only the art of fiction, even when it is biography, can give to men and women. The portrayal of character in fiction demands imaginative insight rather than inventive genius. Mr. Strachey applies this faculty to historical characters whose nearness to our own time lends to his studies a piquancy which aids and abets his irony and his malice.

Readers of *Eminent Victorians* needed no encouragement in the belief that Queen Victoria was fair raw material for his art. It was too evident, nay, it was inevitable. The gods had conspired that Victoria and Strachey should immortalize one another. The task is accomplished. Queen Victoria will now be remembered as a character where she might have become a mere name as a queen : the queen who gave her name to an era. The method of the new study is the same as that of the earlier, but it is more elaborate and more detailed.

Victoria is shown in full length against a background of the era which bears her

name, and if, as was inevitable, it is made clear that she gave little more than a name to the Victorian age, it is also made clear that she was less of a myth and more of a sharply outlined personality than the cynical and sceptical might suppose. In such carefully constructed biography it would be unsafe to ascribe anything to chance, and we may fairly assume that the outstanding interest given to the characters of, say, Melbourne, "child of the eighteenth century whose lot was cast in a new, difficult, unsympathetic age"; Palmerston, "who had no notion what a principle meant"; Disraeli, who, according to Her Majesty, was "the only person who appreciated the Prince," and who was rewarded, among other favours, with "a copy of the Prince's speeches, bound in white morocco, with an inscription in the royal hand"; and, Gladstone, "conscious . . . of the support of the Almighty"; is part of Mr. Lytton Strachey's summing up of the case for Victoria.

He shows her in perspective : a little important figure at the end of an avenue of commanding statesmen. He does more than that. He shows her not as the moulder of circumstances, but as the moulded. An ordinary, capable, laborious, astute, but not strikingly intelligent, still less gifted woman, with abundance of good intent, lifted by chance on to the by no means easy seat of a constitutional throne. You smile, you often admire, but you are sorry for Victoria. A quaint figure of a woman in a place of power, and not devoid of power herself ; with a will, too, if often a frustrate will ; whom only Mr. Disraeli understood. “ She herself had lately published the *Leaves from the Journal of our Life in the Highlands*, and it was observed that the Prime Minister (Mr. Disraeli) in conversing with Her Majesty at this period, constantly used the words ‘ we authors, Ma’am.’ ” And yet how appropriate she was—the Victorian Age needed her to give it sanction : she corroborated it.

She was a brave soul. Lesser courage

might have wilted before the forces which sought to guide her. During nearly three decades a bloodless Armageddon was fought about her—the Great War in little and by anticipation : Germany *v.* England. The protagonists, Stockmar, Lehzen, and Prince Albert, and Melbourne and Palmerston. England won, not by design, but by instinct. Melbourne and Palmerston, and afterwards Disraeli and Gladstone, if they were ever beaten, never realized it, any more than Mr. Tommy Atkins did at Loos or Neuve Chapelle. There are no better things in this book of so many good things than the vignettes of these Ministers of State. But justice, a frozen justice, is done to Albert, the handsome, versatile, capable, but pathetic man who had to win his wife's love after marriage, and the English people's trust by the sweat of his brow. He comes through this ordeal by Strachey with surprising success. We want no more of his kind. Great Exhibitions are as anomalous as Albert Memorials, and if we can never

see him with the eyes of Victoria, except in the pages of Lytton Strachey and her own Diaries, we can think calmly of his undoubted respectability.

His was an influence which we have nearly outgrown, but it defeated in some measure even Palmerston after its author had died. Palmerston had succeeded in side-tracking the Court-loved Gothic architecture of Gilbert Scott. Some of the most ironic pages in Mr. Strachey's book deal with this subject. "I can't have anything to do with this Gothic style," said Palmerston, when he turned down Scott's drawings, which had won the competition for the new Government offices in Whitehall, thus saving us from a second St. Pancras Hotel in the heart of London. O rare Lord Palmerston !

But Scott had his revenge with the Albert Memorial. "His idea," says Mr. Strachey, "was particularly appropriate since it chanced that a similar conception, though in the reverse order of magnitude, had occurred to the Prince himself, who had designed and

executed several silver cruets-stands upon the same model." It is dangerous, however, to quote from this book. The context is essential. Quotation without it suggests the existence of flippancy of which Mr. Strachey is guiltless. His *vol-au-vent* is as satisfying as it is agreeable. At his table also the good wine is saved till last.

It would be unfair, however, to close these remarks without giving a more extended example of the only notable accession to English prose style of recent years ; and no better example could be given than a passage from the final chapter which crowns, as it were, the triumph of the book. Mr. Strachey is describing the passing of Victoria—the death of a Queen and an era :

“ The brain was failing, and life was gently slipping away. Her family gathered round her ; for a little more she lingered, speechless and apparently insensible, and, on January 22, 1901, she died..

“ When, two days previously, the news of the approaching end had been made public,

astonished grief had swept over the country. It appeared as if some monstrous reversal of the course of nature was about to take place. The vast majority of her subjects had never known a time when Queen Victoria had not been reigning over them. She had become an indissoluble part of their whole scheme of things, and that they were about to lose her appeared a scarcely possible thought. She herself, as she lay blind and silent, seemed to those who watched her to be divested of all thinking—to have glided already, unawares, into oblivion. Yet, perhaps, in the secret chambers of consciousness, she had her thoughts, too. Perhaps her fading mind called up once more the shadows of the past to float before it, and retraced, for the last time, the vanished visions of that long history—passing back and back, through the cloud of years, to older and ever older memories—to the spring woods at Osborne, so full of primroses for Lord Beaconsfield—to Lord Palmerston's queer clothes and high demeanour, and

Albert's face under the green lamp, and Albert's first stag at Balmoral, and Albert in his blue and silver uniform, and the Baron coming in through a doorway, and Lord M. dreaming at Windsor with the rooks cawing in the elm trees, and the Archbishop of Canterbury on his knees in the dawn, and the old King's turkey-cock ejaculations, and Uncle Leopold's soft voice at Claremont, and Lehzen with the globes, and her mother's feathers sweeping down towards her, and a great old repeater-watch of her father's in its tortoise-shell case, and a yellow rug, and some friendly flounces of sprigged muslin, and the trees and the grass at Kensington."

June, 1921.

The Englishness of the English

THOSE who would do us good—"wake us up," they call it—often come strangely equipped for the generous task, and holding in their gift crude temptations. This England, they shout, in effect, never did nor never shall lie at the proud foot of a competitor. Which is all very well so far as it goes, but it goes neither far nor deep as more enduring things are measured. I do not underestimate England's commercial supremacy any more than I glory in it as such. In a world given over to commercial warfare an island country that has preferred to enrich itself rather than feed itself must needs have a successful commerce or perish. But I doubt whether all Englishmen who fought lately in the wars were "thinking imperially" in the political sense. Even

those of unstable mind who were impressed into lip-service of the "mammonite creed" were not entirely lost to their real heritage, for when they thought of England they, with the ineradicable poetry of their race, thought not of the scramble for supremacies, commercial or military, but rather of the good fair things that make life sweet and kind and wholesome: fair dealing and fair fighting in a land of hedgerows and green fields, with rolling wolds and downs like the surrounding grey and green sea, and little houses and great houses clustered about grey old churches, and wayside inns and pleasant faces, with sunshine the more welcome because coy, and in winter time a fireside the more seductive because of the outer cold and dark. This is the England for which our men have died—the England which has the reality of a poem rather than the fantastic improbability of a shop or factory.

It is good to fight for such an England, for such a land is that rare thing, an ideal in

being. I know all about the faults of England, and so apparently do other people, but they have not as yet destroyed the character of land or people. Foreigners do not readily understand this. The Black Countries have not defiled the Lakes of Westmoreland or the Dales of Yorkshire ; there are clean and sweet rivers innumerable, and smokeless fens, and heaths and hills, woods and dingles, thorpes and hamlets, which have defied time by refusing to “ get on ” or “ go under ” : which have, in short, remained eternally English. In spite of the fact that we have been dominated by aliens we have remained English. Our kings have been French, Dutch or German for centuries ; our leading lawyers and financiers, pressmen and politicians, Scots, Irish, Welsh, and Jewish. But, what of it ? It is not we who have changed, it is they ! There is no more wonderful or more admirable spectacle in the world than the eternal procession of Scots, Irish, Welsh, Jews, and Germans, striving valiantly to look like Englishmen,

sometimes, often in fact, succeeding ; and it is the more wonderful and the more admirable in that it is voluntary.

The world offers no other example of voluntary nationalism at all comparable with this. People of all nations seeking a change of nationality study how to become English ; and if there is not sufficient evidence for the maintenance of this contention in the judgment of the fastidious, you have only to point to the United States of America, the real melting-pot of Europe, which, in spite of its mixed ingredients and original characteristics remains for all practical purposes English in language and culture. The Americans imagine that they are boiling down and remoulding the raw human material of Europe into something new and strange, but all their efforts up to now have not succeeded in creating anything newer than a variety of the English type. Even many of the new expressions in the American "language" are only a revival of old English words. But, after all, the American people

are only repeating the melting-pot process which England has practised successfully down the ages.

The Englishman is a composite type : an amalgam of Angles, Saxons, Scandinavians, French, Germans, Flemish, Dutch, Jews, Picts, Scots, Irish, Welsh, and Cornish. The English language is just as composite. But the miracle is that out of this mixture a definite type and a definite language have arisen ; and so persistent is this characteristic Englishness that it absorbs all foreign characteristics and approximates them to itself. When we were ruled by Normans we did not become Norman ; the Normans became English. The English language has absorbed more foreign words than any other language, and remained English. It is the symbol and expression of our genius, and the most useful thing we export. Did you think cotton and coal were our greatest exports ? They are only our bulkiest. Our greatest export is that superb instrument of communication which Shakespeare and Wordsworth used.

We are very modest, we English ; we do not realize that the whole world is paying us the compliment of imitation. But we can say quite honestly that we have not sought this form of flattery. The honour has been thrust upon us ; we have won it by remaining English. There are, to be sure, exceptional Englishmen who have become British and set their eyes deliberately in the ends of the earth ; these take joy in thinking “ imperially ” and in “ continents,” which your true Englishman rarely does ; and Mr. Rudyard Kipling, the greatest of them, was consistent enough to be born in Bombay. The true English type does not live by propaganda or policy : it lives by manners and character, by self-centred fairness and excellence : it is its own advertisement. You rarely find it in power ; it is generally ruled by Celts or Jews, who try hard to be and look English because they fear and respect English fairness, humour, and permanence. You cannot alter English character.

A Celt may jockey an Englishman out of power—but no Celt has succeeded in jockeying England out of being English. Cleverness is not an English characteristic: as crooks we are dismal failures. We are not pugnacious, but we hit hard when cornered. We rather like being left alone, and we have quite a lot of taboos. We do not advocate Home Rule for England because we have a sense of humour, and also because we have enough common sense to know that keeping out of politics saves us quite a lot of trouble. This attitude to ourselves made us indifferent to Ireland's claim for Home Rule. In fact, it took us quite a long time to realize that Ireland was in earnest, and when we did realize it, and agreed to give her the strange trouble she sought, that staunch Irishman, Lord Carson, stood in our way. He being Irish, and we merely English, we concluded that he knew best, but by the time we discovered that he didn't, Ireland had changed her mind and was demanding a republic, and is now so vexed with us that

she is trying to get rid of her greatest possession—the English language. All of which strikes an Englishman as akin to speaking disrespectfully of the Equator. These things, however, are noted for contrast, not for contention. The important thing for England and the English is that they should remain England and English. “Who dies if England live?” asked Rudyard Kipling. Precisely: and conversely also: who lives if England die? The question is worth pondering. Internationalism, which is inevitable, may sweep away national boundaries—but that matters little so long as national character survives.

February, 1918.

The Return of Courtesy

DO you remember how bad manners set in when the young men went out to war? How the insolence of shopkeepers added a new terror to life—more terrible than war? Do you recall the new note in female impudence in the Tube lifts? The raucous commands: “Walk right across, there!” “No smoking!” “All tickets!” with never a “Please” or a “Thank you”? And will you ever forget the war-time taxi-driver who only condescended to drive you if you happened to be going his way, and always grouched at what you gave him? Those were trying times. The bad side of war. The good side was at the Front or in the camps; too often, alas, in the hospitals or under the sod, or nowhere, blown to bits. . . .

Those who stayed at home learnt some-

thing. They learnt, in fact, many things ; but, principally, that manners had gone out with the young men. It was one of the many surprises of those tragic days. I did not learn the lesson myself until the young men came back. I mean I did not learn the real reason. The orgy of insolence seemed to explain itself in terms of war-tension. But the explanation was wrong. It was, as I now realize, because the young men had gone away to save us all, and left us to the mercy of the weak, the elderly, the funk, the jack-in-office, and the woman exploding with the arrogance of new-found economic freedom. Now the men who survived are drafted into civil life again, manners are with us once more. Your food in the dining-cars is no longer thrown at you. Clubs are again becoming petticoatless temples of courtesy. You are only occasionally bawled at in the lifts ; good manners have reoccupied the shops ; pertness no longer grins behind the bank grilles ; taxis have begun to go your way.

There is more than a chance relationship between soldiering and manners. It is not only the training ; you find the same courtesy among all men who have had to prepare for danger. Sailors and firemen are invariably courteous. But let me warn my readers that I am referring to that subtle, almost imperceptible, inward regard for the feelings and sentiments of others, and not to that politeness which is only related to it as a mask is to a face. The courtesy born of dangerous living may be superficially rough, it is rarely smooth, and when it shines it does so from innate brightness rather than external polish. You will find it oftener in a shopbreaker than in a shopwalker ; in a Wild West shack than a West End *salon*. It is not inconsistent with evening dress any more than it is with corduroys or khaki ; it has nothing to do with class or culture, education, prestige, or fortune. It is not hereditary ; the hereditary " gentleman " is only polite when he is not offensive, and always most offensive when he is most

polite. Courtesy is generosity of spirit ; it is the mark of the true gentleman. What is a gentleman ? The question is permissible and natural ; but I shall not attempt an answer here beyond saying that he is ever ready to be ungentle in a cause which he believes to be right.

The gentlemen of England who sat at home at ease, in the song, may or may not have been gentlemen at all. The term was poetic licence—which extends to snobbishness as well as exaggeration. In the poetic sense a gentleman is always ready to fight for himself and others. Thus were aristocracies founded and also the queer illusion that they can be perpetuated by primogeniture. After this manner also did manners evacuate England when the young men went out to war, and it is not so illogical to say that manners have been demobilized with the men.

As for women, they are as yet too wild for safe prediction. They have still a monopoly of strategic politeness which made war-

perkiness, while it lasted, more obnoxious by contrast than it really was. Woman, Meredith thought, would be the last thing civilized by man. He was probably right, but her day of barbarity draweth to a close. The "dainty rogue in porcelain" will soon be as extinct as the Pompadour. Universal suffrage, economic freedom, and the sterilization of marriage, have advanced the civilizing of woman more in the last thirty years than any happenings since the Reformation. This is the twilight of the goddesses; and when dawn breaks. . . . By the way, does dawn ever break in such matters? I seem to recall that *The Ring* concludes with *Die Gotterdammerung*. Perhaps, however, goddesses will make a better arrangement: women are more logical than men. Maybe the break of dawn will follow their emancipation and inaugurate a new era of manners which shall look upon politeness as we now regard boorishness.

It has been hinted that manners make the man, and in past times there may have been

something in the idea. But to-day the saying must be reversed. Man makes the manners, and if manners make anything at all in addition to grace and ease of association, they make national character and determine its quality. "Manners," said Edmund Burke, "are of more importance than laws. In a great measure the laws depend on them. The law touches us but here and there, and now and then. Manners are what vex or soothe, corrupt or purify, exalt or debase, barbarize or refine us, by a constant, steady, uniform, insensible operation, like that of the air we breathe. They give their whole colour to our lives. According to their quality they aid morals, they supply them, or they totally destroy them." So powerful a force and one so readily attainable by the just and the unjust alike, as it were, should not be subjected to neglect or base usage; above all, it should not be suffered to pass from our midst without protest. Ill-mannered people are tiresome, whether they adopt the attitude of *noblesse oblige* or that of

the discontented proletarian or the self-contented *nouveau riche*. A world emancipated from such minor perils would be a world well started upon a new and more amiable career. The return of courtesy, which others besides the present writer must have noticed, will be taken by the sanguine as of good omen. It is possibly the first glimpse of the new era of which we have heard more than we have seen ; an era in which manners will mean " playing the game."

April, 1920.

The Showing-Up of Joseph Nollekens

A VERY respectable bibliography could be made of works which have for inspiration nothing higher than a desire to give some one what is known as "a piece of one's mind." In such a catalogue, *Nollekens and His Times*, by John Thomas Smith,* would occupy a place of distinction. Without being a major biography, it is, of course, far removed from such masterpieces as Boswell's *Johnson* and Lockhart's *Scott* or even Festing Jones's *Butler*, it has the all-redeeming qualities of minor biography—readableness, piquancy, and the faculty of gossip mounting on occasion to high scandal. It is also

* *Nollekens and His Times*. By John Thomas Smith. Edited by Wilfred Whitten. 2 Vols. (John Lane.)

panoramically informative about things which you need not know, but which at the same time are well worth knowing, especially when the knowledge costs no mental effort in the acquiring. For Mr. Smith, "Rainy Day Smith," as he is called after another and equally interesting book of his, was a collector of unconsidered trifles in the way of antiquarian gossip about London, as well as a fellow of infinite malice when he came to deal with those of his contemporaries who had used him ill, or whom he imagined had used him ill, which amounts in the long run to the same thing. The majority of those who suffer, especially from social as distinct from physical complaints, are victims of imaginary ills.

John Thomas Smith had the mentality of a rabbit, the acquisitiveness of a squirrel, and the burrowing tendencies of a mole, and between the three this very second-rate writer and observer has made a first-rate niche for himself among topographers. By diligently accumulating and storing facts

about eighteenth-century London he has helped to maintain that period as a more or less going concern and made himself an indestructible link in the chain of London's immortality. But he is most nearly a big fellow, paradoxically, in his revelation of his own cheap, but none the less real, resentment *à propos* his old master and friend, Nollekens, in the minor classic named above.

Joseph Nollekens, R.A., was one of the original members of the Royal Academy of Arts. An accomplished but uninspired sculptor, he was responsible for several of the stony monstrosities of the period which still desecrate the Abbey and other churches, and a large number of portrait busts, or *bustos*, as he called them, of major and minor celebrities of the time. His father came from Antwerp. Joseph was Cockney born. The classical spirit being dead, he went to Rome to cultivate the classical manner. In this he was successful. He became a first-rate manufacturer and merchant of graven

images. It was one of the many periods of spoliation which have visited Italy. Culture at the time meant the accumulation of antiques: Italy was a mine of the raw material required for the support of that pose. Nollekens saw his chance. He loved money more than statues. Rome was the key-vein. He haunted the ruins with other vandals, quarried for Venuses and Apollos, reaping a harvest of glorious fragments. These he transmuted into gold—beautiful golden discs, thousands and thousands of them, each bearing the graven image of His Gracious Majesty George III. He did more: he improved the antique, added to it, restored it, made it acceptable to the rich by many a quaint and clever touch of craft. His *chef-d'œuvre* in this beneficent work is the Townley Venus in the British Museum, upon which he conferred arms, modelling them from those of his pupil and biographer-elect, John Thomas Smith.

When Nollekens came back to England, he was rich and famous in the world of art.

Young Smith became his factotum. He pottered about the studio at the corner of Mortimer Street and Great Tichfield Street, learnt to draw, and had the honour of being patted on the head by Dr. Johnson. He saved Nollekens the expense of model fees by posing and accepting promises, which were never redeemed, for reward. Nollekens was crafty as well as thrifty. He adored something for nothing. If he had not been a work of God he must have been a creation of Dickens, by anticipation. He fed Smith on munificent hints. "You are provided for," he would say, annotating the moments with golden promises. Little Smith, now become Keeper of the Prints at the British Museum, luxuriated in dead men's shoes, and waited and hoped. . . .

Then Nollekens, now become Old Nolly the Miser, passed hence, rich and dirty and famous, and his will, with its elaborate coda, was read almost before the earth of Paddington had fallen upon his coffin. Rainy Day Smith had the shock of his life: he was

cut off with a hundred pounds. He never forgave Nollekens, but we can well afford to look upon this last act of the old sculptor as his noblest contribution to posterity. We can spare his most admired *busto* ; it is impossible to forgive, but we can try to forget his monument to the Captains at Westminster ; but we cannot willingly let die the masterpiece of malice which he stung out of the soul of his disappointed factotum.

Nollekens, according to his disappointed legatee, was crazy and a miser. If the great expectations had developed more handsomely, how easily can we imagine Mr. Smith's elaborate defence of his old master and friend against such charges ! Craziness would have masqueraded as the eccentricity of genius and meanness as commendable thrift. But that would have turned a " human document " into a piece of official gratitude. Praise can only be handled by genius, and not even then with any chance of success if it is in return for benefits bestowed. Minor

writings survive best if they are inspired by minor motives—among which are spite, jealousy, avarice, disappointment, resentment and other reactions from fear, vanity, greed or impotence. Nollekens, shown-up by Smith, is a far greater reality than Nollekens whitewashed by Smith. But all portraits are partial portraits, that is their charm. A good biography is a composite portrait of a man and his biographical maker. Nollekens without Smith would thus be as dull as Johnson without Boswell ; or Hamlet without—the Prince of Poets.

Nollekens may have been mean, even miserly, but he retained his friendships and his servants through life. This is not inconsistent with meanness in material things, but it is inconsistent with meanness of spirit. His biographer is forced to admit also that there are several unaccountable bursts of even material generosity. It is by these admissions that John Thomas Smith ingratiates himself with his discerning readers. His candour about his own feelings for the

man who let him down so badly is as engaging as anything in a wholly engaging book. "It would ill become me," he says, "after venturing to amuse my readers with my old master's weaknesses," if he deprived his victim of some meed of praise where praise was due. The attitude recurs throughout : it is the hardened scandal-monger's attitude. Smith's venturings in that sort of amusement are masterly. Here is a delicious morsel of malice prepense : "Having throughout his long life had fewer vexations than most men, by reason of his natural imbecility . . ." I suspect Little Smith of snobbery as well as malice. Old Nolly was never that, nor was he a prig ; but Smith was. Mark this : "Being without a Confessor, Mrs. Holt, his kind attendant, read his prayers to him ; but when she had gone through them, his feelings were so little affected by his religious duties that he always made her conclude her labours by reading either Gay's *Fables* or *The Beggar's Opera*, at the latter of which, when she came to

certain songs, he would laugh most heartily, saying: "I used to sing them songs once, and it was when I was courting my Polly." The old sculptor is likeable for that passage, and it is not alone. He had his share of the unpleasant vices, but his biographer had more than enough of the unspeakable virtues.

March, 1921.

A Cockney Superman

A FULL-LENGTH biography of the notorious John Wilkes* at this date is, on the face of it, something of a fantastic resurrection. We have all been brought up on the Macaulay idea of Wilkes as "one of the most profane, licentious, and agreeable rakes, the delight of green-rooms and taverns." Further acquaintance with the new work leaves us speculating why the attempt to give a fuller account of such a remarkable and useful character has not hitherto been made. Here, we now realize, was a subject ready to the teeth of those enterprising literary beavers who love to gnaw their way through the musty *arcanae* of the British Museum. Mr. Horace

* *The Life of John Wilkes.* By Horace Bleackley. (John Lane.)

Bleackley has at once created and supplied a need in the monumental tome he has raised to the memory of perhaps the strangest fellow who ever won the honoured name of Patriot. "Wilkes and Liberty" is a forgotten slogan, but, questionable as the shape which inspired it, there is little doubt that the squint-eyed libertine who risked imprisonment for tweaking, as it were, the ambitious nose of George III, was a bulwark of popular rights when they were in sore need of a defender. Henceforth we shall look upon the quaint cartoons, which add to the gaiety of his period by their pointed criticism of the most unhandsome of City fathers, with genuine interest and increased understanding.

Not to-day, however, are we concerned specially with John Wilkes as a curb upon the autocratic ambitions of our Kings. It will be a bad day for England when we have to depend upon such as he for our liberties. When kings kick over the traces the genius of our race will call Cromwells from the

deeper deeps of the national soul—rather than John Wilkeses from its surface. Yet John Wilkes and his kind have their value, if it is largely spectacular. They are part of the pageantry of life—flashes of colour in the drab of cities—civilization's curious indiscretions. And if fate, kindly for once, throw them on the side of liberty, then, maugre many inconveniences, the gain is ours.

John Wilkes stood for liberty against the King, and, in memory thereof, we permit imagination to number us of the crowd which foregathered in Old Palace Yard to greet him as he came triumphant out of Westminster Hall from the prosecution inspired by the appearance of the famous "No. 45" of his *North Briton* periodical—that noisy forerunner of the Yellow Press. We toss our three-cornered hat aloft and cry, "Wilkes and Liberty!" with the best of them. All of which, by the way: John Wilkes is sufficiently astounding, stripped of his historic significance. The flights of the meteoric playboys of politics are familiar to

every age—even ours. Have we not observed them with amused consternation rise to fame on a roar of publicity, loop-the-loop amid the stars, only to fall back to earth and perhaps achieve the decency of oblivion? John Wilkes is not least interesting to us in that he was a genuine “stunt” politician; whose stunt was Liberty; who hitched his wagon to a star because it paid; but he retains our interest because he triumphed over real difficulties of birth and a personal appearance as outrageous as his morals.

There is a boggy-saying of our infancy which most of my readers will recall with a retrospective shudder: “Don’t Care came to a bad end!” So ran this verbal scourge of our naughty-hood. As we grow up we rather imagine, if we think of it at all, which is highly improbable, that it does not always work out so in practice; but if we really wanted proof that Don’t Care sometimes came to a good end we have only to turn to John Wilkes, Squire of Aylesbury, M.P. for Middlesex, Chamberlain and Lord Mayor

of London. His latest biographer goes so far as to call him "incomparably the greatest of the Lord Mayors." If his naughty shade peep over my shoulder as I record this fact, I can fancy the wicked and self-satisfied chuckle as he finds himself empedestalled as a contradiction in ethics! Imagine the silver-tongued Caliban, most monstrously cross-eyed and ill-toothed, bragging that it "took him only half an hour to talk away his face," and that, with a fair start, he could beat the handsomest fellow in England for a lady's favours. It was no idle boast, for did he not outmaster Casanova himself in the conquest of Marianna la Charpillon? But that was only one of his victories, which were frequent, various, and flagrant, and they are not too unblushingly set forth in this diverting book. It was one of his boasts that he loved all women except his wife, and he scandalized even his own scandalous age by publishing a libidinous imitation of Pope's *Essay on Man*, called the *Essay on Woman*, which was in key with his ribald

adventures. Age did not stale the infinite variety of his activities in affairs of the heart. At seventy he made merry with "a juvenile Dulcinea" in Dean Street. This adventure was recorded in the Press. "Alderman Wilkes," ran the pleasantry, "is *finishing* his Essay on Woman in the neighbourhood of Soho; but it is a *weak* and *miserable* performance." John Wilkes didn't care for anybody or anything. He flouted Kings and Ministers of State as readily as he flouted his brother Aldermen and Sheriffs in the City or the mob which worshipped him.

If he could not get votes he bought them. Needing wealth and position he married for money, got his wife to settle her estate on him, then left her—from all accounts there was genuine incompatibility of temper—but Wilkes was hardly a heaven-sent husband. He swaggered through life convinced that not only every man had his price, but that every woman had her price. He was shameless. He bought everything—place, honours, votes—love. He was the sinister and un-

seemly Peter Pan of a corrupt age, with "Don't Care!" ever in his heart, or the automaton that took its place. When Hogarth engraved the cruelly life-like caricature of him he laughed louder than anyone, and in after years he would leer, "I am growing more like Hogarth's portrait every day." When a mob of "patriots" broke his windows he did not reflect on human ingratitude. "They are only," he said, with a smile, "some of my old *pupils* now set up for themselves." (I like him for that.) "Have you seen the infamous libel against you in to-day's paper?" asked an indignant friend. "Yes," chuckled Wilkes, "I've just been writing to the printer of another paper to copy it!" His appointment as one of the governors of the Foundling Hospital brought many a coarse reference to his infidelities; on one occasion a political antagonist accused him of many crimes to his face. Wilkes listened attentively, and as the tirade died down he observed pleasantly: "You have a wretched memory

—you have forgotten all about the Foundling Hospital ! ” His vices were a source of amusement to him. Once, when refusing the offer of a pinch of snuff, he said, “ Thank you, I have no *small* vices.” When dining with the Prince of Wales, who at the time was on bad terms with the King, Wilkes was called upon for a toast and gave, “ The King and long life to him ! ” “ Since when have you become so loyal ? ” sneered the prince, laughing. “ Ever since I have had the honour of knowing your Royal Highness,” replied Wilkes. Wilkes was at his country house in the Isle of Wight when he read the parliamentary report of Lord Chancellor Thurlow’s speech in the House of Lords, when the Chancellor burst into tears, saying, “ When I forget my King may my God forget me ! ” “ God forget you,” said Wilkes, “ he’ll see you damned first ! ”

Often his wit was merely apt rudeness. At a City banquet he noticed a civic dignitary, who had once been a bricklayer, helping

himself lavishly to cheese. "Why, Mr. Burnel," he said, "you lay it on with a trowel." Oftener still he was merely ribald or frankly indecent. But occasionally his wit etched the topic hour and lived vividly in the minds and on the tongues of men. Thus he described Lord Bute's peace with France and Spain as "The peace of God—for it passeth all understanding." An appointment of political opponents to office brought forth the gibe, "Two Secretaries of State in these dangerous times become Ministers by inspiration! We have as little experience of them as they of business." And it is asserted that no true Whig was ever tired of quoting his reply to the lady who invited him to take a hand at cards. "Dear madam," said Wilkes, "do not ask me, for I am so ignorant that I cannot tell the difference between a king and a knave."

A merry reprobate this Wilkes, and ever ready to help his enemies in the amiable process of blackening his own reputation. It might, therefore, be urged that the

Patriot was not so black as he was self- and otherwise painted—still, I fear the worst. But let us not moralize at this late date. John Wilkes died full long ago, and, as he would say, “ I did not make myself, and, being only tenant for life, I am not liable for what the lawyers call permissive waste.” There is just the hint of grace in that whimsy, and if grace abounding be disallowed, then certainly the saving grace of humour. Humour may not save souls that are all black ; perhaps it does not occur in such circumstances. Anyhow, not even Wilkes was so bad as that—he had very white spots. He loved his mother, a fine old woman, whose frank letter admonishing her son’s libertinism is the greatest thing in the book ; he worshipped his daughter, a good-living, frankly-spoken wench ; he served his country, either by design or accident, but still it was service ; and during the “ No Popery ” riots he kept his head, organized volunteers, and did more to save London than any other single person. His

Don't Care habit companioned him to the grave. On his seventieth birthday he said he was really entering his hundred and forty-first year, "for I have always lived two days in one." He was cheerful to the end and whimsically philosophical. Death, he said, was "one of the conditions of human nature, which mankind must generally submit to at the age of three score years and ten." On the Boxing Day of his seventy-second year he was as usual spending Yuletide with his daughter when death took him. Almost his last words were a health to his "beloved and excellent daughter." John Wilkes was certainly an old reprobate—but he was a man, and I thank Mr. Horace Bleackley for his further acquaintance.

His claim to a place in history is largely anecdotal. John Wilkes is one of those who impress by their personalities rather than by their achievements. This book could not have been written otherwise. Even if he had been a pure invention his biography would have been equally interesting at the risk of

being less convincing. He is too improbable for fiction. The tendency of Mr. Horace Bleackley is to make the most of his hero's good qualities, but to whitewash such as he is to spoil the picture. Beyond certain kindly qualities, noted in this article, Wilkes was wanting in admirable characteristics. Even his patriotism, which served so useful a purpose, was but skin deep. He became reconciled to George III and was always on good terms, as might be expected, with the Prince Regent. Once at a levee the King mentioned the name of Sergeant Glynn. "Sir," replied Wilkes, with that whimsical nonchalance of his, "he was no friend of mine. He was a Wilkite, which I never was!" On another occasion as he was walking along the street an old woman cried out, "Wilkes and Liberty!" "Be quiet, you old fool," growled the ex-demagogue. "That's all over long ago." What is really admirable about Wilkes is that he was himself. He laid the foundations of a free Press and established the right to criticize the King's Speech.

Have many statesmen of wider repute done more ? He was neither a fool, a coward, nor a dunce. He said what he thought, lived as he wished and liked what he liked. His reading was considerable ; he was a born orator, a wit, a good journalist, and a clever writer of occasional verse. Dr. Johnson began by looking upon him as a scoundrel and ended by admiring him ; and Boswell was not behindhand in his own appreciation of " the Patriot." But John Wilkes could live without admiration because he had no illusions about himself or his fellows.

August, 1917.

Swinburne : The Man

SWINBURNE was different from anybody else either in his own or any other time. That is the one outstanding fact revealed clearly by Mr. Edmund Gosse.* We knew he was a great poet, we knew the qualities of his greatness as a poet, and beyond such references to the characteristics of his art necessary to the narration of his life, his biographer adds little to that side of our knowledge. But for the first time we are given the opportunity of forming for ourselves a fairly well-defined portrait of the man as he was. I say deliberately "for ourselves," because Mr. Gosse, for some reason, probably his own fullness of knowledge and nearness to his object, leaves his

* *The Life of Algernon Charles Swinburne.* By Edmund Gosse, C.B. (Macmillan.)

picture of the poet lacking in outline and definition. This pen-portrait is in the nature of a replica in words of Watt's famous painting of the poet ; though it does succeed in making you feel that Swinburne, despite his transcendent gifts and rare personal qualities, was also a human being, albeit a very strange one, with an unusual and often uncomfortable share of human frailty.

The weakness of Mr. Gosse's portrait is its vagueness. Many people, among the comparatively few interested in poetry, were aware of Swinburne's peculiarities. But those who did not know him personally were unable to complete their vision of the man because of those, on the whole, kindly suppressions and silences, inevitable in any seemingly ordering of social life. But now that the poet is dead and that the most splendid and wonderful of his circle of friends, Rossetti, William Morris, Meredith, as well as the less splendid but excellent Watts-Dunton, are dead, and his parents are dead also, no further useful purpose can be served

by maintaining a conspiracy of silence. Possibly there is a tendency to exaggerate this conspiracy, and if so, the poet's present biographer has not, which was clearly his duty, done anything to reduce it. On the contrary, his own punctiliousness is calculated to revive exaggerated speculations and create alarmist visions of the inner life of the dithyrambist of passion.

We ought to have been told frankly and definitely whether Swinburne fashioned his poems out of his personal experiences, or whether he was as much the rhetorician of love as, we are assured by Mr. Gosse, he was the rhetorician of republicanism. Instead of that we are treated to nothing but hints and evasions. So far as his biography is concerned only two sources of inspiration are traced back to actual Swinburnian experience ; one, his verifiable love of the sea ; and, two, his undoubted tendency to hero-worship, as exemplified in his wholehearted admiration of Victor Hugo, Mazzini, and Landor. In all other respects this

exposition of the poet is obvious, uninspired, and confusing. It is regrettable and unforgivable because Mr. Gosse is probably the last man of letters sufficiently close to Swinburne and his circle to be acquainted with all the facts. Let us therefore try to figure for ourselves a compact view of the poet from information supplied by Mr. Gosse, and by legitimate deduction, for on Mr. Gosse's own admission the biography is not an attempt to place Swinburne as a poet, but to reveal him as a man.*

It would be difficult to imagine a more eerie being. As a child Swinburne was, if not a sport of nature, at least a sport of his class. The English aristocracy never threw so strange a shape. It was as though a group of primroses had suddenly produced

* Since writing this paper two further contributions to our knowledge of the poet have been published. *The Boyhood of Algernon Charles Swinburne*, by his cousin, Mrs. Disney Leith (Chatto and Windus, 1917); and *The Letters of Algernon Charles Swinburne with some Personal Recollections*, by Thomas Hake and Arthur Compton-Rickett. (Murray, 1918.)

an orchid. There is no doubt of the existence of this strangeness ; all the evidence supports it, though Richmond's portrait of the infant Swinburne reveals a beautiful and apparently normal child. But Richmond painted at a time when flattery and portraiture were synonymous. At the same time, Swinburne never lacked a certain and indefinable beauty of person at all stages of his life. His cousin, Lord Redesdale, supplies a memorable word-picture of the poet as he appeared on entering Eton. He contests with commendable frankness the legend of Swinburne's " golden aureole " : " At that time there was nothing golden about it, red, violent, aggressive red it was, unmistakable red, like burnished copper. His features were small and beautiful, chiselled as daintily as those of some Greek sculptor's masterpiece. His skin was very white, such as one sees in the petals of some roses."

Another contemporary at Eton, Sir George Young, describes his hair, which was always worn very long, as being of three different

colours and textures—red, dark red, and bright, pure gold. Another cousin, Mrs. Disney Leith, says that his “eyes were the most striking feature of his face. Always expressive, they had, when he was at all eager or excited, a peculiar brightness—as if his soul actually leapt up to them and went out to you. . . . A peculiarity was the length and thickness of the eyelashes, which he used to complain would get entangled in a high wind.” Mrs. Leith is of the opinion that most of the descriptions of him are grotesque, but she considers Lord Redesdale’s to be pleasing and characteristic. He was a little boy, of a lovable disposition and always addicted to books. He made his first appearance at Eton with Bowdler’s *Shakespeare* under his arm.

We are not surprised to learn that he was not at home among Eton boys. The really surprising thing is that so strange a little fellow could survive the fierce normalities of the great school. He was enabled to do this by the gift of unexpected courage, which

did not brook interference ; and although he refrained from sports, never having so much as possessed a cricket-bat, his indomitable love of swimming probably saved him from the contempt of his schoolfellows. A further example of his courage is the record of his Spartan climb of Culver Cliff in the Isle of Wight. He was seventeen when he left Eton and wanted to go into the Army. This his father would not hear of on account of the boy's apparently frail physique. Swinburne was intensely disappointed and his dignity was doubtless offended. During the Christmas holidays at this time he had gone out for a long seaside walk and found himself at the foot of the Culver precipice, one of the steepest cliffs on the English coast. The idea that he had never really tested his endurance or faced real danger came to him, and he decided to prove his strength and courage by climbing the face of the cliff. Without any hesitation he first threw off his clothes, took a dip in the cold sea to steady his nerves, and then

climbed the cliff naked. He succeeded in his perilous achievement, falling unconscious on the top. Swinburne certainly possessed courage, but not normal courage.

But courage or no, one can imagine that such a boy must have been a soul apart among normal boys, and that Lord St. Aldwyn's memory of "a horrid little boy with a big red head and a pasty complexion, who looked as though a course of physical exercise would have done him good," must be taken as a fair index of contemporary Eton opinion, even if we did not know he was referred to as "Mad Swinburne." Future historians may emphasize that he was something of a "mark" at school; this idea is supported by the comment of Cookesley, his master, who took a class in an upper room which was approached by a sort of ladder. Swinburne arrived late one morning, and as, eventually, his wild and glowing head appeared above the floor the master paused to exclaim, "Ha! here's the rising sun at last!" The beauty of the child must have

been, none the less, extraordinary, especially as it survived so many peculiarities, such as, for instance, his head, which was very noticeably out of proportion with the rest of his body. Apart from his amazing hair, he had a remarkably high forehead, and, at the age of twelve, his hat was the largest in the school. He had a receding chin and the most disastrously sloping shoulders, both of which peculiarities, and the smallness of his body and tiny hands and feet, would accentuate his disproportionate head. Mrs. Disney Leith is of the opinion that the height of his forehead and profuse hair made his head appear, in youth, much larger than it was.

These characteristics were permanent. The child was father of the man, and one can imagine how this strange being appealed to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood when he blossomed out as a poet. He fitted into that cult of the exotic. In addition to his weird appearance he had peculiar nervous movements: "From earliest childhood he had the trick, whenever he grew the least excited,

of stiffly drawing down his arms from his shoulders and giving quick vibrating jerks with his hands. His family always insisted that he spoilt his shoulders and made them sloping by this trick which dragged them down. If he happened to be seated at a moment of excitement, he would jerk his legs and twist his feet also, though with less violence. At such times his face would grow radiant with a rapt expression, very striking to witness. All this developed itself in early childhood, and alarmed his mother, who applied to a specialist for advice. After a close examination the physician's report was that these motions resulted from 'an excess of electric vitality,' and that any attempt to stop them would be harmful."

Throughout life it was the same. Rossetti was irritated because he jumped about the studio like a cat, and another observer described his appearance in early manhood as resembling that of a vividly coloured macaw. Such, appropriately enough, was the author of "Songs and Ballads," and

such he remained, altered only as the trees alter. The elder Swinburne, of the declining years at Putney under the kindly janitorship of Watts-Dunton, "the little old genius, and his little old acolyte, in their dull little villa," as somebody described the *ménage*, was just a faded macaw. At the same time he was ever gracious and courtly, and his graciousness triumphed over his peculiarities for those who had eyes to see. "The Swinburne of the Pines," says Messrs. Hake and Compton-Rickett, "was, despite the *aura* of waywardness that still hovered about him, a gracious and fascinating figure; perhaps even the more lovable because the impish and wayward spirit had never wholly quitted him." And Mrs. Leith says that "to us who knew him he will ever be less the brilliant and epoch-making genius than the affectionate, loyal-hearted kinsman whom to know was to love."

Latterly he suffered from deafness, which interfered seriously with his contact with the outer world. But in his old age, though

he did not lose his childlike and birdlike qualities, he became something, despite his strangeness, of a venerable figure. The Swinburne of this period is admirably revealed in the following pen-portrait by Mr. Max Beerbohm : " A strange and small figure in grey, having an air at once noble and roguish, proud and skittish. My name was roared to him. In shaking his hand, I bowed low, of course—a bow *du cœur* ; and he, in the old aristocratic manner, bowed equally low, but with such swiftness that we narrowly escaped concussion . . . the first impression he made on me, or would make on anyone, was of a very great gentleman indeed. Not of an *old* gentleman, either. (He was, in fact, not sixty-two.) Sparse and straggling though the grey hair was that fringed the immense pale dome of his head, and venerably haloed though he was for me by his greatness, there was yet about him something—boyish ? girlish ? childish, rather ; something of a beautifully well-bred child. But he had the eyes of a god and the smile of an elf. In

figure, at first glance, he seemed almost fat, but this was merely because of the way he carried himself, with his long neck strained so tightly back that he all receded from the waist upward. . . . When he bowed, he did not unbend his neck—the length of the neck accounting for the depth of the bow. His hands were tiny, even for his size, and they fluttered helplessly, touchingly, unceasingly.”

One other characteristic must be noted, his peculiarity of voice—high-pitched at all times, but not unpleasant when under control. He would chant poetry to himself or to anyone who would listen to him, and they were many, without regard to time or place. His utterance was rapid but melodious, and it would appear that it was only in moments of extreme excitement that he became strident ; then his words became a shriek.

It is admitted that this vividly coloured apparition of a man was not always accountable for his actions. He needed mothering. The needs of his life made this impracticable, except intermittently, in the proper quarter.

So he fell under influences, some good, some bad, and, in about his fortieth year, was rescued from the perils of himself by Watts-Dunton, carried off to Putney, and there dominated by that good soul for over a quarter of a century. Previous to this period of comparative calm and freedom from annoyance he had periodical nervous breakdowns. They always occurred after a prolonged stay in London, but it is not quite clear what form of excitement brought them on.

It is on this point that Mr. Gosse commits his greatest sin of omission. He hints at "rackettings" among London friends, and he seems to have a grudge against Watts-Dunton for putting a veto on these Bohemian practices and friendships. But there his information ends—actually before it becomes information. Did the poet drug or drink too much? Or was he over-addicted, as his poems might imply, to exotic adventures of the flesh? Was his nervous weakness congenital or contracted by excess, or both?

Students of Swinburne's poetry have a right to know. A biography of Swinburne with any claim to authority defeats its own object by silence on these points. Mr. Gosse goes out of his way to destroy the value of Swinburne's revolutionary politics by arguing that these were very largely the outcome of his admiration of Victor Hugo and Mazzini. Are we, then, to assume that his equally revolutionary amorousness was the outcome of some influence equally remote from actual experience or conviction? We are not told. Mr. Gosse leaves us to draw our own conclusions and, by his manner of leaving us, to assume the worst, which is unfair to a great poet and a fine gentleman, for, with all his peculiarities, Swinburne possessed essential nobility.

April, 1917.

Irrational—A Lay Sermon

*A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread, and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilderness—
O Wilderness were Paradise enow.*

RATIONS and rumours of rations play havoc with our peace of mind these days, therefore it is with a sense of helpfulness that I set at the head of this page the pleasantly imagined substitute for mundane bliss, Englished out of the Persian of Omar Khayyám by Edward FitzGerald. Many hearts, even in happier times than these, have responded to the famous lines, and indeed there is much to be said for the sentiment bodied forth with such lyric grace. But for us they have a new meaning. Romance being temporarily suspended for the safety of the realm we can regard them

in the hard light of reality, although that I fear is no guarantee that we shall be reasonable in our judgment, for being rationed we have become rational about everything, except food. Dainty folk who, in the good old days, laughed with W. S. Gilbert at the idea of the commonplace young man who was "fond of his dinner and didn't get thinner on bottled beer and chops," now find the subject no laughing matter—on the contrary. . . . But, you say, Omar's quatrain is not about food. Is it not? Do not verses feed the mind, and wine the imagination, and bread the body, and love the heart? Let us examine this grave objection more closely.

As to the dietetic qualities of literature I could produce much evidence, in defence of what has been called "a feast of reason and a flow of soul," but will content myself with the testimony of that reliable and experienced observer, Tom Hood, who, forced by physical disability to absent himself from coarser fare, found in books the wherewithal not only to

satisfy bodily needs, but to acquaint himself with such luxurious repasts as might have entertained a Lucullus. "Denied beef," he asserts, "had *Bulwer* and *Cowper*—forbidden mutton, there was *Lamb*—and in lieu of pork, the great *Bacon* or *Hogg*." As for liquid refreshment, though confined, as he says, physically, "to the drink that drowns kittens," he "quaffed mentally, not merely the best of our own home-made, but the rich, racy, sparkling growths of France and Italy, of Germany and Spain—the champagne of Molière, and the Monte Pulciano of Boccaccio, the hock of Schiller, and the sherry of Cervantes." Depressed bodily, he says, again, by "the fluid that damps everything," he got "intellectually elevated with Milton, a little merry with Swift, or rather jolly with Rabelais, whose Pantagruel, by the way, is quite equal to the best gruel with rum in it." Thus does literature "palliate and compensate for gastronomic privations," a circumstance worth remembering with a falling food thermometer.

Corporeal wine has long been favoured as a food for imagination and a suitable accompaniment of love. But the need of it in the latter circumstance is but a poor compliment to the beloved ; how more excellent rare Ben Jonson's preference for " a kiss within the cup " ! But surely the need of wine as a stimulus postulates enervation, or the fear of it. The man who cannot get drunk on water is no poet, although, to be sure, it was Keats, as true a poet as ever lived, who gave us the most exquisite expression of vinous exaltation in all literature :

*O for a draught of vintage that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth !
O for a beaker full of the warm South !
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth ;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen . . .*

But perhaps this was only rhetoric—" Your talkers are never doers," as a modern philosophy would have us believe.

Bread, on the other hand, has ever been acclaimed a reliable food ; even that friend of the people, my Lord Northcliffe, has busied himself about its standardization—high patronage for the “ staff of life.” And yet it is said that “ man cannot live by bread alone,” which is perhaps a truism. None the less it would be more difficult to live without it, although we may have to try the experiment before “ Cease fire ! ” if the annexationists have their own way. (Pardon, Mr. Editor, this reference to a forbidden subject !)* But doubtless, my readers will agree, it was Paracelsus who got more out of bread than any other mortal, for he tasted all the stars and all the heavens in a crust of it.

As for love, it feeds the heart, as I have said, but the lack of it starves the body, as is proved by the numerous instances of wasting in those whose tender devotion was unrequited. Pale and wan lovers are in the stockpot of every bard. Generally speaking,

* The war was *taboo* in the pages of *To-Day*.

the poets are unanimous in their appreciation of the satisfying qualities of this passion. "Love is enough," sang William Morris, and an older, but anonymous authority, tells us that "Enough is as good as a feast." That being so, one almost doubts the inspiration of a poet who needs to augment an affair of the heart, even though its scenario be the wilderness, by such comestibles as verses, wine and bread. Did Omar lack imagination? or confidence in himself or—did "Thou"? Was she a Mrs. Shandy? Wilderness, to the true lover, ought to have been paradise enow, without any accessories. All of which does not invalidate the combination of love and feasting; these things go together; "a little cosy feast to crown the day" is every lover's dream, but love, in the absence of food and even comfort, ought to be self-supporting. This seems so obvious that one almost doubts the authenticity of any other kind of love, even when advanced by a great poet. We must never forget that John Keats wrote :

*Love in a hut, with water and a crust,
Is—Love, forgive us!—cinders, ashes, dust ;*

and he was jilted by Fanny Brawne. Apologists for Keats have blamed Fanny, but may not her intuition have been truer than her lover's love? Things might have been different had he sung and believed :

*Love is enough : Lo ye who seek saving,
Go no further ; come hither ! there have been who
have found it,
And these know the House of Fulfilment of Craving ;
These know the Cup with the roses around it—*

And so ends my sermon ; it may not, like a real sermon, get anywhere in particular—but that will help to distinguish it from those that do—and if it escapes dullness as well, no one will grumble.

February, 1918.

The Flowing Bowl

FOR many years there has been an obvious decline in ceremonial drinking. High prices and reduced qualities of the popular beverages which do intimidate our wits have had something to do with it—but not all. Those who have lost the habit of quaffing the flowing bowl on the slightest provocation, or, again, those who have never got into that habit, have found that drinking strong liquors by the proxy of poetry is not an unpleasant experience. But the flowing bowl and good-fellowship will, I imagine, always be associated, although it is being found to an increasing extent that the combination is not always necessary. And just as Silenus is being driven from our streets so, in a lesser but still observable degree, is

Bacchus being given the cold shoulder at our tables.

Wineless weddings, for instance, are not uncommon nowadays, and among the working classes I am told the ancient custom of what used pleasantly to be called "wetting the baby's head" is also on the decline. Neither is the ceremonious quaffing of glasses over a chance meeting of acquaintances so insistent as of yore. On the contrary, the old request to "Come and have a drink" is almost out-moded in these days. "Come and have a cup of coffee" is taking the place of the traditional formula. I do not know that the change is resented to any great extent. But I did hear of an instance in which scorn was poured upon it. The occasion was the aftermath of a lecture in the provinces. The hero, the late Mr. Cecil Chesterton, had been enticed into the club-room behind the hall, and greeted with the familiar request, "Will you have a drink?" "Certainly," replied the thirsty lecturer. "Tea or coffee?" was the affable rejoinder.

The lecturer looked hurt. "I do not call that *drink!*" he said, and good-humoured scorn lurked in the last word.

Even in business circles the change is noticeable. At one time it was considered impossible to conclude a bargain unless the delicate wheels of commerce were oiled with strong drink. Modern business men have exploded that idea, and drinking during business hours is reduced to a scale that has filled our brewers and distillers with consternation. The business man of to-day is no longer afraid of water as a beverage, and if he wants to be particularly festive he may indulge his mood on lager. The "nip" before lunch is almost entirely confined to the old school. When the younger generation feels parched at about 11 a.m. it fearlessly enters a tea-shop or a *café*. Such a proceeding twenty years ago would have overwhelmed the offender with the chaff of the whole office.

I would not go so far as to say that this revolution is the reflex action of a change of

taste. Men like the taste and effect of strong drink as much as ever they did ; the change has come about more in the sphere of the social amenities. Those who were in the habit of imbibing not wisely but too well, have realized that it is no longer advisable to drink beyond stability-point if they desire, which they generally do, the good opinion of their fellows. The new attitude, I am convinced, is not moral in the old sense. People care less and less whether a thing is good or bad according to abstract principle. What they do care for is whether a thing is useful or useless ; harmful or harmless. Einstein has long since been anticipated in morals. People find drunkenness and fuddle-headedness both useless and injurious. It is a question of expediency. A man who drinks to the extent of losing control of his wits is a nuisance in public life and a disaster in private. Modernity has learnt this from experience. There are those even who go so far as to say that it was business interest rather than moral enthusiasm which

precipitated Prohibition in America. Strong drink and efficiency were found to be incompatible ; and the most powerful supporters of the movement were and are the chiefs of big business enterprises.

Nevertheless, we still sing the praises of drinking, and will continue to do so ; although it is doubtful whether such popular drinking classics of a couple of decades ago as “ Beer ! beer ! glorious beer ! ” and “ Hi-tiddley-hi-ti ! ” would have quite the same popularity now as they had at their inception. Dipsomania does not strike even the man in the street as so humorous a thing as it once did. Our interest in the drinking song is becoming academic. It is sung and very often written by people who do not drink. At the same time our own age has produced one or two fine songs of the kind written apparently out of genuine experience. One recalls Mr. Hilaire Belloc’s vigorous song of ale with its sixteenth-century flavour :

*If I was what I never can be,
The Master or the Squire ;*

*If you gave me the rape from here to the sea,
Which is more than I desire :
Then all my crops should be barley and hops,
And did my harvest fail,
I'd sell every rood of my acres, I would,
For a bellyful of good ale.*

That is almost as good as the greatest of all drinking songs, which dates back to the days of Elizabeth :

*Back and side go bare, go bare,
Both foot and hand go cold ;
But belly, God send thee good ale enough,
Whether it be new or old !*

I have heard this chorus from the famous song in John Still's *Gammer Gurton's Needle* sung boisterously and enthusiastically by a gathering of undergraduates at Oxford as though they were all whole-hearted toppers, when as a fact the favourite tippable of half of them was tea and of the other half—barley water. That is not an unusual thing, for people who are most abstemious love, for instance, to read Mr. G. K. Chesterton's

and Mr. Hilaire Belloc's praises of beer. Rarely, however, would these people delight in the old beery ribaldry of the music-hall; still less would they ever dream of becoming fuddled or even exhilarated by drink.

They are generally cultured folk and perhaps a trifle sentimental. Intellectuals who have been nurtured on soda-and-milk take extreme delight in Mr. A. E. Housman's

*Oh many a peer of England brews
Livelier liquor than the muse,
And malt does more than Milton can
To justify God's ways to man.
Ale, man, ale's the stuff to drink
For fellows whom it hurts to think :
Look into the pewter pot
To see the world as the world's not.*

And cultured folk who have never ventured further with Bacchus than, say, shandygaff or claret-cup revel in Mr. H. G. Wells' eulogy of the same malten brew in *A Modern Utopia*, and the "aged and great wine"

chapter in Meredith's *The Egoist*. But there the matter ends ; their interest in drinking is harmlessly literary : sentimental bravado. It is far different from that of the people who used to yell " Beer ! beer ! glorious beer ! " in the streets of a Saturday night, or those forbears of theirs who roared John Still's drinking song in the taverns of Shakespeare's England. The rejuvenescence of the drinking song in modern poetry, and the general interest taken in Bacchanalian literature, does not mean, then, that the habit of excessive drinking is about to return, it simply means that people are enjoying the thought rather than the act, exercising, as it were, the race-memory, and it confirms rather than contradicts the decline of an ancient habit.

But in spite of the moderating influence of modern conditions in the matter of the more exhilarating beverages, men have drunk too deeply in their pilgrimage through these glimpses of the moon ever to forget the genial effects of liquids inspired by the

spirit of the grape, the sun-kissed hop, or even the homely potato ! What kindly and generous emotions are associated with these strong waters — what merriment — what passion ! The tavern, even when a paternal puritanism robs it of most Bacchic potions, will always remain a symbol of ease and good-fellowship, of high talk and inspired imaginings, in the memories of men who in that ill day, if ever it come, will no longer be patrons of mine host. The idea of the tavern can never die—it has been sung by the bards :

*Souls of Poets dead and gone,
What Elysium have ye known,
Happy field or mossy cavern,
Choicer than the Mermaid Tavern ?*

And it was Keats also who imagined the same poets who had gone hence

*Underneath a new old sign
Sipping beverage divine,
And pledging with contented smack
The Mermaid in the Zodiac.*

Astronomy does not acquaint us with taverns in the sky although Mr. Chesterton has written entertainingly of a Flying Inn, but no one will deny that the pleasanter of all literary associations are marked by the swinging signs of houses of good cheer. When one thinks of Chaucer one thinks of the Tabard Inn at Southwark, where the Pilgrims assembled; Shakespeare and Ben Jonson recall the Mermaid; Samuel Johnson and Goldsmith, the Mitre and the Cheshire Cheese, and even unimpeachable Tennyson drank ale at the Cock. Is not the coldness of Eastcheap warmed by the thought that in those commercial surroundings Jack Falstaff caroused with Poins, Bardolph, and Prince Hal? What would Charles Dickens be without the taverns which shine like welcoming beacons through his pages? Their very names have a fragrance, a *bouquet* of warmth comprised of honest food and drink in an atmosphere of frank welcome: the Maypole at Chigwell; the Red Lion at Barnet; the Marquis of Granby at Dorking;

and the White Hart in London Town. Yes, we may drink less, and it may be good for us to drink less, but if there had been no drinking in the past we should have been the poorer in kindly memories.

June, 1918.

Suprême de Sole—Caprice Précieux

WHEN Eugenius and I dine, as we do, alas! all too infrequently, it is not so much to satisfy appetite as to appreciate each other *à propos* of good food. To eat, to talk, to drink, knowingly, regardful of the amenities: the flavour of food, the *bouquet* of wine or words, or wine and words, for the two are married thus and have most agreeable issue. Such occasions have but a traditional relation with hunger; they are not for satisfaction so much as for gratification. Hunger is not to be despised. It has its place, but that place is not among the urbanities. You may satisfy your hunger alone; hunger is better satisfied alone—it is primitive; it is war. There is, indeed,

something unseemly in the sight of people satisfying their hunger—it has all the pathos of nudity ; not the nudity of art, for that is made decent by reason of its veil of idea or expression—the artist drapes the figure with himself. But you cannot stop these rever-sions to the primitive ; all you can do is to avoid them. One of the ways of avoiding hunger is to dine. Dining is an art. Those who dine are artists, they place themselves between feeding and eating, and by doing so take part in a ceremony rather than yield to a function.

“ God,” paraphrased Eugenius one night at Savarin’s, “ God might have created a better fish than the sole—but doubtless God never did.” I made no immediate reply, not that there was none, nor yet that I lacked it ; but our palates responded so readily to this just sentiment that indulgence in the elusively delicate flavour of the most spiritual of fishes was more appropriate than words. Then I said : “ In himself brother sole is an ungainly fellow and uncomely, too, obviously

and consciously incomplete as he wobbles in a sort of green-grey boredom beneath the Straits of Dover awaiting the trawl-net which shall give him immortality." "Surely it is not the trawl-net which gives him immortality?" "No, Eugenius, you are right. Not the trawl-net. When God created soles He left His work unfinished. It was not completed until He had created Colbert." Eugenius raised his glass of Goutte d'Or—*à Colbert*, he said; I raised mine—*à Colbert*! "God," added Eugenius, with feeling, "could not have made Antonio's violins without the hand of Stradivarius"—"That," said I, "is George Eliot, she is never mentioned at dinner—never later than tea." Eugenius conceded my veto with a deprecating smile, for George Eliot is one of his many and varied strange tastes: "*Revenons à nos soles*," he said.

I suggested as an axiom that as all souls of one kind were equal in the sight of God, all *les autres* were equal in the sight of the epicure. Eugenius concurred, with a foot-

note to the effect that *cuisine* should be postulated. "And yet," I conjectured, "there are preferences, for have we not preferred *Sole Colbert*?" We agreed that the sole and the moment might be mated on different occasions as admirably as on this one. We pondered this nice point. "At a banquet of many covers, for instance . . ."

"I object to banquets of many covers," murmured Eugenius. "I stand by Brillat-Savarin's twelve-cover limit." "So do I—but, in the words of Bernard Shaw, who possesses *esprit* at the cost of *goût*, what are we two against so many?"* He peered through the liquid gold in his glass, inhaled its fragrance, and sipped and said deliberately as though pronouncing an edict—"Soles should not be served to crowds." "Not even *Sole Royale*?" "Not even *Sole Royale*—soles are not for the crowd."

* John Wilkes (see pp. 87-99) was also a few-cover man. A dinner party, in his opinion, "should never consist of more than the number of the Muses, nor of less than that of the Graces."

It was no easy task to apportion the varied masterpieces of sole dishes to their appropriate moments. It was a task demanding scholarship of the table as well as experience of life. *Sole Colbert*, our initial masterpiece, was indicated for little occasions made big by long-standing friendships—the covers limited to four, *sex au choix*, on the grounds that this immaculate dish inspired sedate moods. For a *dîner intime*, *Sole Véronique*, or for one of those adventures where indiscretion is the quintessence of valour, *Filet de Sole Meunien aux Muscats*. In these circumstances a little music enhances the bouquet of intimacy and the delicacy of the dish—but the music should be distant and from a small orchestra—not a Jazz Band. Eugenius interpolated approval here. “Sole,” he said, “is not eaten to Jazz.” You may take *Filet de Sole frit* at lunch or at home, but the sin of *pommes frits* should be left to the proletariat who rightly call them “chips.” They are *de rigueur* with fish and feeding at Sam Isaacs. It is better, however, not to fry

your fillets. *Filet* is but a stage in the art of cooking—it requires the attentions of a Robert or a Carême to complete it. *Sole frite* should be served complete. This noble fish was given *vertebrae* to sustain him in the frying-pan or on the grill and to imbue him with succulence. Abstain then from rending him before incarceration and oh, fall not so low as to permit your waiter to maul him so that he may appear boneless, even after he has been suitably fried. *Filet de Sole à la Horly* is one of those marinaded master-pieces whose piquancy suggests light-hearted ceremonies and may be eaten accordingly—on an inheritance, a birthday (“If you are under forty-five,” commented Eugenius), at a reunion, and at, Eugenius added, “a re-marriage.” I left it at that.

And so we annotated the course, concluding with a grand recital of sole dishes as a sort of homage—a garland of *chefs-d'œuvre* laid at the feet of the great *chefs*. Eugenius called it *une Anthologie des Soles*. Let us repeat a few of the principals for very joy

of the act—*Carrelets et petites soles frites ; Souchet de Soles ; Mayonnaise de Filets de Soles ; Délices de Sole Bréval ; Filets de Soles à la Montreuil ; Filets de Soles à la Rouennaise ; Suprême de Sole Caustière ; Suprême de Soles . . .* “ Shall we end there,” asked Eugenius, “ on the assumption that all soles are supreme ? ” We did. Then it was that we discovered our omission, our sin of omission, for we had left out that treatment of our brother from Dover without which no true justice had been done to him or to us. We had forgotten—Grilled Sole. “ Whenever I eat Grilled Sole,” remarked Eugenius, “ I feel as though I were spending a week-end with Marius and Flavian at White Nights with the ‘ Golden Ass ’ of Apuleius as the novel of the season.” And when you come to think of that delicate elusive flavour—an embodied fragrance—you recall white things. “ Like eating purity,” said Eugenius. “ All the primary colours of taste transfused into their essential clarity, distilled, filtered, refined, until the

palate must have genius to taste it ; the sole is the fish of genius—it required genius to imagine him, genius to cook him and genius to eat him.” “ Yes,” Eugenius agreed, “ and now I think the *Relevé* should be ready. What is it ? Ah, *Canard Pressé aux Petits Pois*.” “ And,” I recalled, “ a half-bottle of *Clos-Vougeot*.”

March, 1922.

On Writing Letters

THE trouble begins when you receive a letter. I mean a letter which is a letter, not a bill or an invitation to attend something (or to attend to something), to help some one or to subscribe to something: these are not letters. Such missives are communications, and may be answered or ignored according to your importance, indifference or courage. I remember a play which opened with an elegant room into which an elegant male strode and took from an elegant desk a little heap of letters which had arrived by the morning post. He scrutinized the envelopes and dropped them back, one by one, on to the desk unopened with some such running commentary as :

“ Bill—Bill—Invitation—Bill—Bill—Bill—Circular—Bill . . .” and then he paused, holding one with interest; he smelt it, sighed, threw the remainder down, broke the seal and became absorbed in its contents. Thus the play began with a scented letter. But perfume is not necessary to the perfect epistle, or, rather, extraneous perfume, pleasant though it may be; your perfect epistle carries a fragrance of its own. But the trouble none the less is that the perfect epistle demands an answer—the more fragrant, maybe, the more imperative the demand which, not being a churl, you will obey. That, I say, is the trouble. But there are other and more subtle complications, not least of them the danger of spoiling the good impressions of a good letter by an indifferent anti-climax, dictated by good manners or mere gratitude. Would it not be better to wire or 'phone? A telegraphed acknowledgment convinces by its opulence and

alacrity, and it does not compete with a masterpiece. Telegrams are an art in themselves.

Then there are letters which answer themselves. The thoughtless are fond of the platitude that all letters answer themselves in due time. That may be true of many letters, but not of all, because a great many letters are written about nothing, and to result in nothing would seem appropriate. Such letters do answer themselves: they are their own answers. But who has not been reduced to nervous shreds and tatters during the process of allowing the best of letters from the best of people to answer themselves? Conscience rarely tortures so acutely as when it sets out to admonish the letter dodger. The best way of dealing with letters is to answer them as soon as you have read them. An ideal doctrine for automata. But many of us in our traffic with letters believe not that to-morrow, but that to-day never comes. We have the

mañana habit; we will do anything, but do it now.

*To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death.*

Our punishment is not greater than we can bear, for we always succeed in bearing it. We epistolary slackers enjoy perversely the scourging of conscience because we are supported by our own promises to ourselves. We must really answer that charming letter from Eugenius (or that adorable one from Phyllida) to-morrow. But we don't: and as for to-morrow never coming—alas! is it not always to-morrow?

For mine own part, I have retired from the contest. I have put myself beyond temptation and reproach. I have made my peace. No longer do I correspond with my friends, *nulla pallescere culpa*. I have tired them all out with my epistolary inactivity,

in fact, they no longer correspond with me. But I am not desolate, for I have entered into a pact with the past. Despairing of keeping pace with the new I have allied myself with the old, and my epistolary troubles are no more. While I have been fretting myself over my own shortcomings, receiving charming letters whose very charm betrays me into verbal impotence, I have been leaving unanswered still more charming epistles whose writers never in their most inspired or far-seeing moments imagined or expected that I should reply—or even thank them. All hail, gracious gossips of the past, who prattle down the ages without expectation of a reply! Hail, noble and gentle ladies, Lady Mary Montagu and Dorothy Osborne, Mme de Sévigné and Mlle de Lespinasse, above reproach or reproaching! Hail, Horace Walpole, with your sweet immortal malice; and good Mr. Samuel Richardson, with your nice sense of virtue, keep me always informed of the

fears and vapours of Pamela and Clarissa and the perfections of Grandison. I salute you also, gentle William Cowper, at Olney, no home news from you is too trivial for me ; and Thomas Gray, sedate, austere ; and, you, good Charles Lamb, friendliest of penmen ; and swashbuckling Byron ; and Shelley, too, I welcome your passionate reasonings and gay pictures from Italy ; and your inspired enthusiasm, John Keats ; and nearest our own day, Old Fitz, most quaintly garrulous of Epicureans and idlers, your welcome is certain, no matter how frequent the post.

Why should one annoy oneself with self-reproaches when one can have such correspondents for the asking ? There are those who complain that the epistolary art is in its decadence. It may be ; but what matter ? One thing is certain, and it contains infinite consolation—no one of your friends is likely to exceed in wit, in wisdom, those letter writers of other days, even if

you are fortunate enough, which is the luck of few, to be among the correspondents of the one or two good letter writers of any ordinary generation.

September, 1922.

Libraries of Living Books

AT the opposite poles of bookdom there are two definite classes, one large and the other small. They are, those who never read and those who read too much. Between are the hordes who read too little. It was the ideal of the late Andrew Carnegie to bring about a better average of reading between these groups, and to that end he disgorged many of his millions for the establishment of free libraries. Nothing has so convinced me of the dangers of a millionaire class ; and should this numerous and still growing class of not unworthy folk, as some are brave enough to advise, suddenly make benevolence of the kind a habit, the results might be serious. To let a hundred millionaires go

about the world indiscriminately doing good would be to outdo Armageddon in destructiveness. When God made millionaires He gave no indication of ulterior motive. Millionaires, so far as one is able to judge, are not a means to an end, they are an end in themselves and must therefore be judged by the amount of good they do on their way up and not upon what they may do when they get there. All of which is by the way. My theme is the book in its collective and individual aspects.

I think it is a mistake to make books too accessible. They should be accessible to all who want or need them, but not for the asking. Book-getting should be difficult and even risky, like the getting of money. It would then be appreciated. Although even that would not keep books away from the unworthy any more than it has kept money out of unworthy hands. Indeed, when you come to think of it—and that is away from my theme again, and how many of us are

worthy of money, anyhow! Perhaps that is why some Socialists would abolish it. If socialism succeed it will be because it is under no illusions about human frailty. But to return. . . .

A great deal of nonsense is talked about books, especially when they are assembled in libraries. A public library is an invaluable institution for the student. It is essential for purposes of research. But a public library may also be nothing more than the convenient instrument of a bad habit. I would put that statement into a simple affirmative and say that public lending libraries are nothing more than aids to mere book-gobbling for the majority of their users. So convinced am I of this that I would be an enthusiastic supporter of any well-devised measure that would provide for a close-season for reading, and even for buying, books. A test of the wisdom used in the framing of such a measure would be the penalties imposed upon illicit reading or

buying during the close-season. Poaching of this kind, displaying, as all poaching does, an overweening love of sport, or of the thing poached, should be rewarded Gilbertianwise—with a free pass to all bookish places and stores. But awards and penalties would settle themselves; sufficient that a close-season for books might have the same effect as a close-season for game or seals or whales or penguins. People would be forced to cleanse and invigorate their minds, to deepen their imagination and to strengthen their souls by direct contact with the life that is about them, rather than be left to continue in the habit of collating a very tiny experience of life with the disproportionately great records to be found within the covers of books.

Some few years ago Lord Rosebery referred to a library as a cemetery of books. The image is not overdrawn. It is wrong only in implication, for even cemeteries are useful. But let us accept Lord Rosebery's

statement at its face-value, by admitting that it is better, even among books, to have a live ass than a dead lion. What a glorious adventure—a library solely of living books. And the fun about it is that the ideal is easily and inexpensively attainable. It would be small ; not much larger than Sir John Lubbock's " Hundred Best Books "—but not necessarily that particular hundred. In fact, there is no hundred *best* books. That would be the first thing realized by those about to form a library of living books. To adapt George Withers :

If it be not best to me

What care I whose best it be !

Such a library, then, would be small, personal, and, I fancy, old, as old wine is old, that is, ripe. Books have to be " laid down " a longer period than wine if their full virtue is to be developed. It takes ages to make a book. Not every one who puts his pen to paper achieves a book, even if any single

person ever does. Your great eternal books are produced by nations or even races ; it is only minor writings that are produced by individuals. Authors are only so called out of compliment. They are merely writers, expressing the race-will and the race-experience. Have you noticed that there is a dispute about the "authorship" of many of the greatest books—Homer, Shakespeare, the Bible—but, not another word, we must not discourage authors ; some of them are quite useful.

Let no one jump to rash conclusions, however, for I would be clear as well as honest. Even dead books have their uses, like the mummies in the British Museum. And books of a day serve at least the day's purpose. Frail books also, dainty, shameless, butterfly books, which take more than they give, have also their place in a living book-world, just as frailty has elsewhere. And also we must remember that although some books are great all of the time, and all books,

some of the time, no books are great all of the time. Therefore our library of living books must not be too lofty. The crux of the matter is that a public library is a cemetery of books when it is made a substitute for personal book ownership. A man who loves books will want his own books, for in his library he will find himself, and we have been told that the first of all possessions is self-possession. A library of living books is the expression of oneself in the books of others. A man may also discover himself to others by the same process. Show me a man's books and I will tell you what he is, not his trade or social standing, but what the essential *he* is. Unless books reveal a man to himself and others in this way they are a cumbersome hindrance to life, and had better be burnt, or subjected to the modern utilitarian alternative, pulped.

Reading is almost as much an art as writing. If we were to judge solely by the

average quality of books produced nowadays we might be forced to the conclusion that writing was the lesser art. I refer to great reading. Little reading has also its place, despite Schopenhauer's objection to thinking with other people's brains. There is no harm in this so long as you don't overdo it. The exercise wisely indulged might be a useful form of mental athletics. The only evil kind of reading is easy reading, for that has a narcotizing effect inducing slumber of brain and soul. People should make a practice of reading those books which are hard to read, for by so doing they not only use another's brain, but they master the technique and learn the mechanism of a better brain than their own. Difficult books uplift you in the realm of thought. Books, even difficult books, serve other purposes, both good and bad. Some send you to sleep, and others keep you awake, both desirable functions at the right time and place. Some make you forget ; some give you

knowledge, but none do more for you than reveal you to yourself as in a magic glass, with the world as your setting and your place in it defined.

February, 1920.

The Smallwares of Literature

I HAVE a special compartment of my book-world for the smallwares of literature. It is really a cosy corner, intimate, purposeless, snug. You may often catch me there. Not that I neglect the heavier goods—your hardwares have their place. I have even been discovered in the Manchester department of economics, and, save my patriotism, among the German wools! Yes, fingering, with amateur rapture, hanks of Hegel and reels of Kant and skeins of Nietzsche, and growing woollier and woollier and woollier until I experienced all the sensations of primal fleece. But among the smallwares of the world of books it is otherwise. Here is no lack of definition because definition is not the aim. How pleasant it

is to browse among inconsequent things ; things that are unlaboured, that, like Whistler's idea of art, have just happened. But that after all is only an illusion, for the smallwares of literature are often portentous.

Under this title I would class all the minor literary forms, such as epigrams, aphorisms, emblems, characters, and that wide and sometimes wild miscellaneous realm of writings known as *analecta*, thus including anecdotes and certain of the goods catalogued by the booksellers under *curiosa*, but eschewing *facetiae* for their dullness, tracts, anagrams, acrostics, enigmas ; as well as macaronics, lipograms, and such-like literary trickery, with palindromes, limericks, quodlibets, and puns. As a rule my smallwares realm is ruled by personality, and it rarely crosses the frontiers of problem. It is not concerned with solutions, but with revelations. It abhors tricks, but reverences whims. Curiosity rather than cleverness is the pervading motive, and the spirit of discovery

underlies all its activities. The true-born books of this delectable republic of letters must have the qualities and potentialities of treasure-trove. They provide the raw material of research, but for my purpose they provide the media for search without the purposefulness suggested by the prefix. You search for the love of searching, not with any specific object, and you find what the mood rather than the mind requires.

Some such procedure underlies all reading. You read to find something—facts ; to gain something—knowledge ; to achieve something—happiness ; to know some one—Shakespeare or God ; to become something—yourself or some one else : the objectives may be varied according to taste or experience. With the smallwares of pencraft you do no more, but you do it differently. Here there is only the minimum of order, and surprise is erratic. There is order of assembly, to be sure, in such amiable jungles as Francis Peck's *Desiderata Curiosa*, in Sir Egerton Brydges's *Censura Literaria* and

Restituta, in John Nichols's *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, and in Nathaniel Wanley's *Wonders of the Living World*, but it is only a very superficial ordering after all, for convenience, not for conclusions, as in that masterpiece of scientific organization, Sir James Frazer's *Golden Bough*, which, despite its attraction for the book browser, can never be classified as smallwares.

You approach the first-named volumes in the spirit of adventure (adventures are to the adventurous in arm-chairs as well as out of them), as you might enter an unknown wood or a strange and tangled garden. There are treasures in abundance and in infinite variety, but you are not positive that you will find them, nor are you anxious, you just roam around and let them find you. It is the difference in experience between the deliberate search for birds' nests and the lucky but unsought discovery of one; the accidental happening upon an early violet in an unexpected place varied by the

possibility of meeting a green and vermilion parakeet where you expected no bird more exciting than a sparrow. The *Golden Bough* does not provide such adventures, because it suggests a woodland only in name; it is really a well-arranged and well-lighted museum, from which surprise has been eliminated by the most surprising inclusiveness in literature. Sir James Frazer has crowded all the mysterious and fantastic habits of gods and men into his wonderland of words, and he has performed his task so well that you can go to his pages at any time knowing that what you want is there, and confident that you will get it. Such books have both use and charm, but they are not smallwares.

The smallwares of literature are varied and entertaining, but it is probable, in our hurrying times, that the secluded and winding path with its multitudinous *flora* and *fauna* whose published manifestation is known as *ana*, is unfrequented save of the very few who are interested in all that pertains to

books and their writers. Yet at no very distant date collectors of the half-forgotten and unconsidered trifles of literature were a numerous class. This is proved by the existence of many published and unpublished commonplace books. Many writers have diligently kept similar records of their adventures among masterpieces. Doubtless there are many who are still addicted to the gentle art, and it is certain that as time goes on specimens of these collections of fugitive opinions and quotations will find their way into print. The most notable recent volume of the kind is the *Extracts from the Note Books of Samuel Butler*, which contains, as might be expected, more literary and intellectual originality than reflected literary glory. This invigorating volume resembles more the sketch-book of an artist in pictures than an ordinary commonplace book. It reveals the progress of the ironic mind of the author of *Erewhon* over a great part of his life, and is in the nature of an informal autobiography. Its literary kin are the

notebooks of Matthew Arnold and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Such books as these bear only a remote relationship to such examples as, say, the four stout volumes which comprise Robert Southey's *Commonplace Book*, or the *Omniana* of the same author. There is further proof of the one-time popularity of volumes of volumes of literary oddments in the large editions of *Keepsakes* and *Elegant Extracts*, which were a common object of the book market during the closing years of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth. It is obvious that enterprising publishers of that period traded upon a prevalent habit. But however much delight the collections of the Keepsake period gave to their, I should imagine, mostly "fair readers," these books must be regarded as products of commerce rather than true *ana*.

The value of commonplace books in their published form is indisputable. In the first place, they afford a glimpse into the minds of their authors. If a man is to be judged

by his friendships, how much more certainly can we judge him by his association with books and ideas? This alone is sufficient defence of *ana*. But the books possess also an interest for the student of history and bibliography. Bibliographers of all time owe a debt of gratitude to that diligent burrower among books, Sir Egerton Brydges, whose massive *Censura Literaria* and *Restituta* are rich mines of the book-lore of other days. But whilst not despising their practical value for the purposes of literary research, the reader is often attracted to books of the *ana* class for far less laborious reasons. They supply him with a fascinating key to personality. Is there, for instance, in the whole realm of literature a more interesting revelation of the mental quality of a great genius than Ben Jonson's *Timber*, the noblest book of the class in the English language? What would we not give for a volume of similar reflections from Jonson's fellow-playwright—William Shakespeare!

The test for the smallwares class is

whether you can dip or not. Now dipping is one of the chief faculties of the art of reading. It is half-way between reading and brooding. The class of books I am describing lends itself to the process. Perhaps all reading in relation to all books is nothing more than a long or short process of dipping. The idea is supported by certain of the most adorable contributions to the smallwares class. What, for instance, are such fascinating books as Frederick Locker's *Patchwork*, Edward FitzGerald's *Polonius*, and, of more recent appearance, Austin Dobson's *A Bookman's Budget*, but the records of infinite, witty, and scholarly dipping on the part of three most admirable bookmen? To dip again by proxy of such books is the very epicureanism of adventure among the smallwares of literature. The centuries of the printed word have many such books, and books worthy to be their companions, to name but a few at random, but in all honour and reverence, liking their very names: King's *Anecdotes* and Spence's *Anecdotes*,

Observations, and Characters of Books and Men ; Walpoliana ; Passages from the Note Books of Nathaniel Hawthorne ; Hazlitt's Thoughts and Maxims ; Samuel Rogers's Table Talk and Porsonianana ; John Davidson's Sentences and Paragraphs ; and last and greatest, Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, compiled seriously and scientifically, but enthroned and ripened by wise time as the book of books of its class, wherein you may dip or wander, browse or search eternally with eternal wonder and delight.

Let us not, however, slight by omission others less glorious though not less characteristic. Space cannot be found even for naming the anthologists of epigrams, aphorisms, and their kind, for their name is legion. But it is necessary to bring within the pale certain writers who have the right to be there, in spite of claims elsewhere and the unlikely form of their works. I refer to such essayists as, say, Abraham Hayley who, in, for instance, his edible treatise on *The Art of Dining*, has brought foodlore

rather than opinion within the reach of bookfolk. King among these writers is surely the engaging Dr. Doran. His bedside manner in smallwares was genius. There are others, but let these and this suffice, for in the last resort every good bookman will assemble his own smallwares department and manage it himself—and now that I have given it a name many others may like to give it a local habitation.

June, 1919.

On First Editions

ONCE more we are witnessing one of those booms in first editions which periodically affect the book market, and once again careful folk are wondering whether first editions, merely because they are first editions, are worth the high prices that are being asked and paid for them. The question is not easy to answer. Nothing, commercially speaking, is worth a high price if you can get it at a lower. Indeed, no price is justifiable at all if you can get what you want or need for nothing—except on grounds of enjoyment, for it is a strange freak of human nature, and, perhaps, other kinds of nature, too, that what is easily or cheaply acquired, no matter how good, is least appreciated. And so with first editions of

books. They are not valued in ratio to scarcity or quality, but, like other goods, in ratio to scarcity and demand regardless, in the main, of their qualitative relationship to the works of their authors or literature in general.

The astute collector, with an eye on the inevitable day of reckoning when realization of his books in terms of cash will be forced upon him or his heirs, seeks to anticipate the market. He cultivates the less fashionable *rariora* ; those, as yet, unconsidered trifles which will one day come into their own as stimulators of biblio-acquisitiveness ! For all books, like all dogs, have their day. As much may be got out of this form of gamble as out of any other, and it is less risky than the Stock Exchange or the Turf. It is none the less a gamble and must not be confused with culture, scholarship or, even, bibliomania.

There are periodical booms in *editiones principes* just as there are in Kaffirs, Rubbers, Oils and other stocks and shares. Adventurers

on these perilous seas are lucky if they do not get "left," for market "rigging" is not confined to Throgmorton Street. Charing Cross Road also understands the gentle art. The boom which immediately preceded the present one occurred during the first few years of the century. Mr. Augustine Birrell marked the occasion by a wise comment. "Sordid souls," he wrote, in 1905, "have been induced by wily second-hand booksellers to buy books for no other reason than because the price demanded was a high one. This is the very worst possible reason for buying a book. Whether it is ever wise to buy a book, as Aulus Gellius used to do, simply because it is cheap, and regardless of its condition, is a debatable point, but to buy one dear at the mere bidding of a bookseller is to debase yourself. The result of this ungodly traffic has been to enlarge for the moment the circle of book-buyers by including in it men with commercial instincts, sham hobbyists. But these

impostors have been lately punished in the only way they could be punished—namely, in their pockets—by a heavy fall in prices.” Perhaps Mr. Birrell takes the matter a little too seriously, it is a subject for amusement rather than scorn ; and as a matter of fact the book prices which slumped so badly some twenty years ago have all “ come back ” plumper and more villainously tempting to the seller than before. War inflation has had something to do with this, but apart from changed money values book prices have materially advanced.

But that is not what the non-expert, your bookless plain man, means when he wonders whether the first editions which are rising into the empyrean of high finance where only profiteers or plutocrats may breathe, justify such high prices. In short, have first editions any intrinsic value ? The answer is, yes ; but rarely is this inward and fundamental value consistent with mere price. It is only in very exceptional circumstances

that intrinsic and price values of first editions bear any relation to each other.

When you hear of a first edition of *Venus and Adonis* changing hands for £15,000, you must not jump to the conclusion that an American millionaire has suddenly arrived at the opinion that Shakespeare's morning-poem of love and life is worth that sum of money. Whoever pays a fortune for a book, first editions of which sold for £91 in 1840 and £300 a decade or so later, is not buying poetry, but property. A *Venus and Adonis* at £15,000 actually becomes prohibitive as poetry. It is too expensive to read, too rare even to touch. When a book becomes real estate it ceases to be a book in anything but name, and even the millionaire who becomes the proud owner of such a volume must needs go and purchase a shilling reprint if, which is unlikely, he desire to read it. Even a millionaire could not afford to read Shakespeare in £15,000 copies. But since it is improbable that a millionaire has time for books other, of course, than those most

romantic of all books, namely, bankbooks, it is appropriate that he should buy only those which are too expensive to read. There is a sort of poetic justice (or is it revenge ?) in the sky-rocketting of first editions once the price exceeds the possibilities of the genuine bookman's purse.

It is late in the day to moralize on such transactions, and, indeed, a waste of time. Men were collectors ever, and for good or ill the few will continue to collect books for the mere joy of collecting. Among them there are not many who are not moved by the sight of a first edition—especially if it is rare, or if, in the pleasant jargon of the craft, it does not “occur” often. In the essay from which I have already quoted, Mr. Birrell advises us, or those of us who care about such matters, to be of good cheer, for first editions are not literature. “The moment you become a tradesman you cease to be a hobbyist. When the love of money comes in at the window, the love of books runs out at the door.” But, can you collect

first editions for their own sake? I believe you can. First editions have an intrinsic value which has nothing to do with the value set upon them in the booksellers' catalogues.

Mr. R. W. Chapman, in a volume* distinguished alike for its scholarship and literary charm, puts the case for the intrinsic value of old editions better than I have seen it stated elsewhere. He says :

“ The man who has no feeling for old books because they are old lacks something of literature. Everything that is old yet still lives has a title to reverence, for it has been spared by Time the winnower, whose forbearance is a patent of nobility. But an old book has more than the dignity of age ; it has a piece of immortality as well. Since a book is not a disembodied spirit, but a soul compact with clay, the gayest and most prosperous of new editions may suggest to a

* *The Portrait of a Scholar and other Essays written in Macedonia*, 1916-1918. By R. W. Chapman, R.G.A. (Oxford University Press, 1920.)

sensitive imagination an incongruity as of varnished decay, a hint of graveclothes beneath the trappings. But the grace of an old book is vernal and autumnal. It is as old as the date on its title-page, and as young as the hour it was born. It has distilled from the homage of generations the incense it could draw, and has kept all the freshness of a budding flower.

Of both these secrets, those who are worthy of them may partake. The volume which turns a sullen back to the idle gaze of indifference will glow with life in the sunshine of admiration and knowledge. To be blind or indifferent to those aids to understanding, which a first edition can lend, is to lose a link with the past. Even literature is subject to a slow decay ; our comprehension of dead writers must pierce a mist of ever-thickening gloom. A book coeval with its author has a quality in common with his genius, and a history which is a pale analogue to the history of his fame. It is a slender bridge across the ages, a faint clue to the

past. To the lover whose fingers thrill to the touch of old vellum, whose eye lights to the appeal of faded print, an old book will yield something of the treasure of its experience, something of the bloom of its youth."

I apologize to Mr. Chapman for stealing so much of his music, but the reader will not expect an apology for so felicitous a buttress to my argument.

So when we see the plutocrats competing one with another for possession of these slender bridges across the ages, let us not vex our souls with vain arguments about prices. Possession is everything, and every time one of these treasures passes beyond the purse-power of the poor but passionate lover of books into the control of those who hoard for vanity and not for love, let us mourn our loss: let us mourn our defeat, for every great and rare book which is "knocked down" to the highest bidder, solely because he is rich enough to bid high, is a defeat for literature.

The defeat is all the more ignominious just now, for it generally involves transportation of the precious volumes to another land. America is rapidly becoming the internment camp of our fairest literary treasures. We are rich in great books and America was poor. She is now richer, and we do not grudge her some of our treasures, but unless a check is put upon the expatriations which have been going on for so many years, England will have no old books, first editions or otherwise, beyond those protected in the Bodleian or the British Museum. Private inheritors of our rare books have become tradesmen.

The genuine lover of old books and the real student of good reading, the two are not necessarily the same, should therefore take heed of what is going on in the book market. They are the natural protectors of our great and traditional heritage of masterpieces in English literature, and they should keep an ever watchful eye upon the situation. Everyone who can afford to buy a good book

is not necessarily worthy to become its possessor, so that those who sell books should use as much discretion in selling as they use when buying. They should sell only to the deserving rich. . . .

Book collecting may, of course, become a mania, but book madness may have method like any other madness. You may collect, for instance, more books than it is possible to read in a lifetime in the firm belief that somehow and sometime you will find time to read them. This is one of the most familiar of bookish illusions. It is often devastating in its effects both on the pocket and the character. The delusion that time holds an oasis for quiet reading has the pathos of all wishfulness.

Then there are those hopeless folk who accumulate books because they feel that they cannot live without them. They rarely read; they just collect. George Gissing has crystallized the type clearly and sympathetically in "Christopherson," which the curious may find in his volume of tales called *The*

House of Cobwebs. This is bibliomania without method and as pathological as it is pathetic. Method, however, comes into play with those opulent collectors who buy only what is rare, whether it be a kingly First Folio Shakespeare, or some poor little drab of a seventeenth-century tract which, by escaping the destruction it deserved, has won for itself bibliographical immortality. To be unrecorded by Bohn and unknown to the British Museum is to achieve fame which mere merit rarely gives to a book. The method of this madness is the undoubted pleasure felt by possessing what another lacks. It is a form of pride ; futile, but not, as I imagine, unpleasant. Life would lose much of its charm if we lacked such harmless futilities, and, if they passed from the world of books, many honest fellows called booksellers would be puzzled as to their means of livelihood, for this kind of book-madness makes the " knock-out " at book auctions one of the safest and easiest forms of commercial piracy.

In America bibliomania has developed along new and efficient lines. In some instances it is so careful and even calculating as to have become a sort of bibliographical methodism. Here the curious may observe bibliomania wedded to commercial shrewdness, sanctified by financial laws and organized on a staying basis. With the exception of a few rich amateurs book collecting in England is the passion of numerous men of small or moderate means. They adore their books passionately, like lovers, or with quiet, self-approved dignity, like gentlemen. They have not waited until they became rich before they have sought and bought; they have made sacrifices in many instances so that they might lay up treasures in the heaven of their own little libraries. They constantly repeat the joy of Charles and Mary Lamb, and the folio Beaumont and Fletcher. To be rich enough to pay any price for a book is to be too poor to appreciate the experience. "Do you remember the brown suit, which you made

to hang upon you, till all your friends cried shame upon you, it grew so thread-bare—and all because of that folio Beaumont and Fletcher, which you dragged home late at night from Barker's in Covent Garden? Do you remember how we eyed it for weeks before we could make up our minds to the purchase? ” There is the great book spirit. But since everybody cannot be poor, let us pity the rich with their blunted appetites. America is ingenious with her riches and may yet evolve new subtleties of sensation for her opulent bibliomaniacs. No people of spirit will shut themselves out for ever from such rare sensations as those experienced by Charles and Mary Lamb. We may yet live to see millionaires immolating their fortunes for a book—a Rockfeller giving a hundred thousand pounds for a quarto “Hamlet,” presented by Will Shakespeare to his friend Ben Jonson, or a Pierpoint Morgan offering a million for an autograph copy of the First Epistle to the Corinthians!

Among American book collectors, who

have method in their madness, Mr. A. Edward Newton must take a high place. We know him, for he has told us all about himself as a bookman in an amiable and enthusiastic piece of bookish gossip.* Mr. Newton is, however, something more than a mere collector. He collects to read and reads to collect; and the essays in his book, on Lamb, Mrs. Thrale, Godwin, Trollope, and Dr. Dodd who compiled *The Beauties of Shakespeare* and died on the gallows, prove that he has collected and read to some purpose. The essays have no small bibliographical value, since they are written around rare first editions of the authors concerned or of still rarer MS. diaries or autograph letters in Mr. Newton's collection. But he is none the less keen as a collector, and like all of his breed he is pleased to invent reasons for his hobby. Book-collecting is for him no more than a sport. "I look upon it as a game," he says, "a game requiring skill, some money, and luck." I

* *The Amenities of Book-collecting and Kindred Affections.* By A. Edward Newton. (John Lane, 1920.)

think Mr. Newton is unfair to himself. He may, and very probably does, enjoy the pleasure of the chase, but he brings abundance of evidence to prove that he loves the quarry as well. To collect books merely for the fun of the game is to place yourself on the level of the fox-hunter. Mr. Newton is higher than that : he is one with those who hunt to live.

Here is Mr. Newton's philosophy of book hunting, and it is a very frank statement of an honest, unpretentious attitude towards books :

“ The world is the college of the book-collector of to-day. Many of us are busy men of affairs, familiar, it may be, with the price of oil, or steel, or copper, or coal, or cotton, or, it may be, with the price of the ‘ shares ’ of all those and more. Books are our relaxation. We make it a rule not to buy what we cannot read. Some of us indulge the vain hope that time will bring us leisure to acquaint ourselves fully with the contents of all our books. We want books

written in our own tongue, and most of us have some pet author or group of authors, or period, it may be, in which we love to lose ourselves and forget the cares of the present. . . . And note that these collections are formed by men who are not students in the accepted sense of the word, but who, in the course of years, have accumulated an immense amount of learning. Clarence S. Bement is a fine example of the collector of to-day, a man of large affairs with the tastes and learning of a scholar. It has always seemed to me that professors of literature and collectors do not intermingle as they should. They might learn much from each other. I yield to no professor in my passion for English literature. My knowledge is deficient and inexact, but what I lack in learning I make up in love. There can be no greater praise of books than the love you give them."

Mr. Newton is a specialist and fastidious. No mere first editions are good enough for him. He is after big game all the time.

First editions are only unique when all save one copy have passed into limbo. But every presentation or "association" volume has a quality peculiar to itself. "For the most part," says Mr. Newton, "presentation copies are first editions—plus." They have other advantages besides the quality of being unique. They are personal, intimate, they enable us to "get back of the book to the writer," and, not least, the best of them are constantly soaring in financial value. And it is "right here" that we make contact with the soul of American bibliomania: which is—plus. The big American collector covets only the hundred per cent books—the immaculate, the unique. He is getting them. It was an American who said "Money talks: conversation doesn't." Money is talking the best of our books into America. Mr. Newton's entertaining confessions read like the tocsin of British book-collecting. Very soon British book-collectors will have nothing to collect but the second-rate stuff; the plus books will all be over the water.

And—this is the irony of it—it is the successful business men who are making America the greatest library in the world, and our business men, equally rich, are letting them do it.

July-December, 1920.

The Difficulty of Prose

ONE of the most persistent of literary illusions is that the writing of prose is easier than the writing of verse. It is generally accompanied by the sister illusion that verse is less popular than prose. The contrary is nearer the truth in both instances. Most of those who try can write passably good verse where they fail to write passably good prose. Further, there are far more triers at verse than at prose. Why? In the first place those who think they can write prose rarely pause to consider whether they are writing prose or something else, because prose is popularly assumed to be all that kind of writing which is not verse. In the second place verse-writing is the more primitive, and therefore the more instinctive, and therefore,

again, the easier because the more natural form of written expression. This, you may say, is mere theory. So it is. But as theories go, it is none the worse for that, and as for facts, it is only necessary to indicate two. The first is the constantly recurring phenomenon of verse-writing as a symptom of adolescence. Youth bursts into song on the slightest provocation. The second is the epidemic of verse-writing in full flux at this very moment. Never were there so many volumes of verse; never so many verse-writers, and those who succeed in bringing their compositions to printing-point are in the minority of those who use or abuse metre and rhyme for the purpose of expression or amusement or vanity. The remarkable output of verse and poetry at the moment is perhaps a little abnormal, but it certainly indicates a hitherto unsatisfied taste for this form of literary composition.*

* See pp. 203-214 for further details of what has been called the " Boom in Poetry."

These volumes are read, it is true, very largely by those who have written, are writing, or would like to write verse, and the fact that many more of them (volumes, not readers) are issued than volumes of prose, say genuine prose essays, novels or plays, proves that verse is more popular than prose. But, you object—and there is as much meaning in your “but” as there was virtue in Touchstone’s “if”—what about the newspapers: are not they very prose of very prose, and popular? What, again, about novelists with high-velocity circulations; do not these walk in the garden of prose? They do not, nor are newspapers found there. Those about to become popular shun prose as they would the plague. They angle with *clichés* and dazzle with jargon. They grow rich and famous, but they do not write prose, because, desiring success, and being good business folk, they know that the lovers of prose are so few as to be beneath commercial notice. Some of them could

not write prose if they tried, others resist a temptation that does not pay.

The love of prose is as rare as the art of prose is difficult. There are even more genuine lovers of genuine poetry; and poetry is rare enough. Note how numerous and at what length critics and interpreters discuss poetry, and even verse, which is not the same thing. For one book on prose there are a hundred on poetry. Poetic anthologies are "as plentiful as tabby cats—in point of fact, too many." Prose anthologies are rare, and rarely appreciated. Think of the vast circulation attained by Palgrave's *Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language*—my edition is dated 1894, and up to that date no less than thirty editions had appeared since the first issue, in 1861. In the initial year it was reprinted three times. Since 1894 many more editions must have been sold, augmented by the fact that the famous little volume is now free of copyright. Has a

prose anthology ever achieved a second edition? But the popularity of poetic anthologies is not confined to one book. Quiller-Couch's *Oxford Book of English Verse*, by reason of its wider range, competes severely with the *Golden Treasury*, and runs it close in popularity in spite of its higher price. And if it were necessary to multiply facts one has but to indicate the *Oxford Book of Victorian Verse*, Bullen's charming anthologies from the Elizabethan and Caroline gardens of verse, notably the *Lyrics from Elizabethan Dramatists*. There is no anthology of prose from Elizabethan dramatists. More recent verse and poetry is only less popular, as Mr. Edward Marsh's *Georgian Poetry* volumes prove.* Nor need we confine

* Further evidence of the very real public appreciation of poetry may be found in the following figures kindly supplied me by the publishers of the well-known anthologies I have named. Neither Messrs. Macmillan, nor Mr. Humfrey Milford of the Oxford University Press were able to give me exact numbers of copies sold, but the number of *editions* indicate that those figures must be enormous; the *Golden Treasury* having

ourselves to the present time for evidence of the popularity of poetic anthologies. Such selections have been appreciated in past ages from the time of the Greek *Anthology* to the *Miscellanies* of the eighteenth and the *Keepsakes* of the nineteenth centuries.

How many of my readers can name a prose anthology? Not many. There are not many to name. I value two as highly as the best of the verse anthologies. William Ernest Henley and Charles Whibley's *Book of English Prose*, covering the period 1387-1649, and giving an inspiring selection of masterly prose which tunes the heart of the prose-lover up to adoration-point

gone into no less than seventy editions, the *Oxford Book of English Verse* into seventeen, and the *Oxford Book of Victorian Verse* into five *impressions*. Messrs. Sedgwick and Jackson and Mr. Harold Monro of the Poetry Bookshop, were more explicit. The former tell me that their admirable *Poems of To-Day* has sold 165,881 since 1915 and the *second series* 29,909 since its first issue in May, 1922. The figures of the *Georgian Poetry* series are as follows: (i) 15,000; (ii) 15,000; (iii) 15,000; (iv) 13,000; (v) published Dec., 1922, 5000.

on almost every page; and John Masefield's *Book of English Prose* (1907), which covers a wider field with equally certain taste and discrimination. There are others, but these, I think, are the best, and the reading of them and the re-reading of them, for they are permanent companions standing the test of familiarity and intimacy as only the best books do, emphasizes the need of a prose anthology which shall do for our noble prose what the *Golden Treasury* and the *Oxford Book of English Verse* have done for our poetry. There is urgent need of such a book. Our prose is degenerating. We must be recalled to the undefiled wells of English prose. Who shall say how much the steady flow of good poetry owes to the example of the great anthologies! The influence of Palgrave's anthology alone must have been incalculable.

Prose has fewer devotees, but national expression must deteriorate (is deteriorating) unless those who love the virility of English

constantly recall readers and writers to the great tradition and the grand manner of our language. A nation can neither think nor imagine greatly in jargon. We need high thought and far vision more than ever, but these will be useless to us unless we know how to utter them in strong words and luminous sentences. So in the midst of the babel of undigested and half-visualized demands of this era of discontent, I send forth my suggestion for the period of change : Give us a good Prose Anthology. Recall us to the big expression of our prose writers so that we shall have the opportunity of catching some of their clear-seeing and clear-saying, and by so doing enable ourselves to see more clearly and express more clearly that which is in us. It is Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's duty to complete his work as an anthologist by setting alongside the *Oxford Book of English Verse* an *Oxford Book of English Prose*. Perhaps the Oxford University Press, that real guardian of English, will take

the hint. If such a book disproved my theory that verse was more popular than prose, if only by proving that the best prose in our literature was equally appreciated, I should be the first to be pleased.*

April, 1919.

* Since this paper was written a notable addition to prose anthologies has been made by Mr. Logan Pearsall Smith, whose *Treasury of English Prose* (Constable, 1919) is by far the best thing of its kind since Henley and Whibley.

Wanted—An Oxford Book of English Prose

Those people are mistaken who imagine that prose is either a natural or a possible form of composition in early states of society. . . . Prose, strange as it may seem to say so, was something of a discovery. If not great invention, at least great courage would be required for the man who should first swim without the bladders of metre.

THOMAS DE QUINCEY.

Mr. Savile was asked, by my Lord of Essex, his opinion touching poets, who answered my lord : " He thought them the best writers, next to those that write prose."

LORD BACON.

MY remarks on prose last month have attracted attention. Two minor poets have written me threatening letters because I placed prose before poetry in order of difficulty, but as their arguments are doubtless inspired by trade jealousy, poets being

notorious jealous dogs, I shall do no more than refer them to the quotations at the head of this End Paper. I would assure them also that my love of poetry is no less than theirs—on the contrary. . . . But the quotations are appropriate in another connexion. Mr. Humfrey Milford has drawn the editor's attention to an excellent prose anthology issued by the Oxford University Press. It is called *The Pageant of English Prose*, edited by R. M. Leonard, and contains five hundred passages selected from three hundred and twenty-five authors. The quotations at the beginning of this piece appear on the title-page and the jacket of the volume. I was ignorant of the existence of this admirable volume and can recommend it both to students and to those who like, as I do, to dip into well-chosen books of quotations for the mere fun of the thing. But it is not the *Oxford Book of English Prose* of my dreams. That, however, is another story. *The Pageant of English Prose* is enjoyable and useful in itself, and apart

from giving a very comprehensive view of the extent and variety of English prose, it affords a means of communication with many of the best and most interesting passages in the works of the ablest of our well-known and little-known writers, not so far as I am aware to be found in any other single volume.

More interesting still is the following letter which I have received from Mr. R. W. Chapman, of the Clarendon Press, Oxford.

“ I have been reading your very flattering demand for an *Oxford Book of English Prose*. I have spent the last three years in desert places, where I wanted it very badly. We have often discussed the possibility. I speak from memory—a memory rather rusty after four years’ exile—and without digging in our voluminous file ; but my recollection is that we always recoiled from the difficulty of the enterprise. It is possible to make a verse anthology by mere selection without any dissection, and the Oxford Book shows what can be done on this principle, though it excludes the plays of Shakespeare and the

Faerie Queene and *Paradise Lost*. But a prose anthology cannot be made without what sensitive critics will always denounce as vivisection, unless it is a mere anthology of essays ; and though it may be possible to operate successfully on reflective and argumentative prose, what is to be done with the novel ? A lesser difficulty is that of discovering the gems that lie hidden in the vast mass of half-forgotten prose of the seventeenth century ; but industry and courage could get over that. Your spirited challenge has set me thinking again, and I will see if with our adviser's help I can make out a programme."

The difficulties indicated by Mr. Chapman are not exaggerated, but they are not nearly so great as the resources of Oxford, and, if I may be permitted to judge from the taste shown by Mr. Chapman in his recently issued *Selections from James Boswell's Life of Samuel Johnson*, Oxford possesses a man who could be safely entrusted with the organization of a representative prose book.

A consideration of the points raised by Mr. Chapman removes some of their sharpness. The task will be difficult, but difficulties did not prevent the making of the *Oxford Book of English Verse*, not to mention the *Oxford Dictionary*. As to "dissection," that cannot be avoided ; this must be granted as a first concession. But I suggest that it would be possible to do more than "dissect," it would be possible to amputate good and typical examples of the best prose from their parent bodies, with as little—shall I say loss of blood and pain?—as the few segregations from context in the *Oxford Book of English Verse*.* Strange to say, the essays will present the greatest difficulties, as these are concentrated prose already and, in many of the best instances, too long for entire representation. With the longer prose works it will be easier ; few sustain the high note

* See the Elegy from "Daphnaïda," Spenser (p. 126), "Under the Greenwood Tree," Shakespeare (p. 181), "Song of the Indian Maid," from Keats's "Endymion" (p. 721), and the selections from "In Memoriam," Tennyson (pp. 836-844).

throughout ; the best are not always at their best, and that best has to be sought and anticipated, though I would not push the metaphor too far ! On the other hand, many considerable prose writers run to vignettes and purple patches—Carlyle in the first, and de Quincey, Ruskin, and Pater in the second instances.*

The novel does certainly present a tough problem—but it should be recalled that we are not interested in the novel *per se* ; our concern is with prose—and the number of novelists who have added to English prose boundaries is not formidable. I could get you the whole of Meredith's prose out of three of his novels—*Richard Feverel*, *One of our Conquerors*, and *The Egoist* ; the essential prose Hardy out of *Under the Greenwood Tree* and *Jude the Obscure* ; the typical Dickens prose out of *Martin Chuzzlewit*

* It may be decided to rule out the "purple patch" as a weed, a splendid weed, but exotic to a properly kept garden of English prose. Ruskin, Carlyle, and Pater would suffer badly from any such "particularist" weeding.

and *Pickwick*, and so on. Of course it would be necessary to ignore conversational passages both in novels and plays, the dramatists being represented by the longer prose speeches or soliloquies. Most other prose is ready made to the anthologist's hand—the strength and beauty, wisdom and whimsicality enshrined so conveniently in characters, epistles, reflections, diaries, prose poems, prefaces, dedications, and in some “prose” translations of poetry, should compensate for the difficulties that beset him elsewhere. And finally, as to the hidden gems that lie in the “vast half-forgotten prose of the seventeenth century,” as Mr. Chapman says, “industry and courage could get over that,” and, I imagine, he would not be at a loss for willing helpers once he made known his need.

May, 1919.

Appalling Slaughter of the Poets

AT a time when there is a necessitous demand for increased production of useful goods, and even goods that have no further claim to utility than that of rendering first aid in the pleasant task of making money, we might do worse than take stock of our poetry. Poetry has long since been our greatest product, but quality rather than output has been hitherto the characteristic which distinguished it from the verses of other and less imaginative peoples. We are helped in such an aim by the opportune appearance of the June *Chapbook* (Poetry Bookshop, 1s. 6d. net), which takes the form of a catalogue of living poets whose books have been or are being published in Great

Britain and Ireland. This illuminating pamphlet is not a census of bards but a record of books published in this country by poets living or recently dead, from January, 1912, to March, 1920, with the addition of the titles of the books of living poets who appeared in published form prior to 1912 from the first issue of their works. The result is surprising.

The list contains no less than 1029 bards, the great majority still living and dwelling in the British Islands. Most of them have issued volumes since 1912, and many, more than one. The number of volumes represented is great, the mass of printed paper formidable. Whatever the output in other lines of business, it is obviously a fact that it is very high in that of poetry. I use the term "poetry" because the compiler of this bibliography does. But how much of it is poetry? How much mere verse, not even amusing verse, mere vanity, mere restlessness, mere hot air, superabundant vitality mis-

applied, unexpressed sex, nerves? God and "Recorder," for so the compiler would have us know him, alone know.

"Recorder" must have read them all, otherwise he could not single out, honestly, certain of the bards for special comment. I wonder what sort of a man this Recording Angel* of Modern Poetry looks like! Has he survived his task? Was it voluntarily undertaken—as a duty or for love? If still alive, is he still sane? Is he also among the poets? Perhaps he is not a man. Perhaps he is a committee—or a woman . . . anyhow, he, she, or it has accomplished a task which most would look upon as a punishment, but perhaps it was a penance—that sounds reasonable; but no, there are so many easier penances. There is something to be said for duty. Many of the most astounding and most atrocious things in

* Some of those who are subject to his comments will call him Recording Devil, and, if I know my fellow bards (not brother bards, mark you, for I write not verse), some of them will want his blood.

history have been inspired by a sense of duty. But the evidence for duty is slight : the comments are too few and too slender, and too unfair, to serve a useful purpose, and other dutiful objective is not discernible. What about revenge ? Yes, there is something in the idea. To read the works of over a thousand modern bards, most of them poetasters and hundreds of them mere verse-merchants, for the pleasure of saying nasty things about some of them seems absurd but reasonable. And is not revenge always absurd ? Shall we leave it at that ?

Now let us examine with a little more application to detail this tell-tale list. “ Recorder ” assures us that “ In no case has comment been attached to a list of books unless it has seemed to the *Recorder* that the author has contributed an original work to English literature, or that he has attained a spurious reputation, which is to say that such verse as appears entirely unremarkable has been ignored.” Note those last words ;

they are worth repeating—"such verse as appears entirely unremarkable has been ignored." There are only 125 comments, so that in "Recorder's" opinion 905 of our published bards are "entirely unremarkable." "What do you think of So-and-so?" asked some one of Charles Lamb, naming the latest bard. "I don't know him," said "Saint" Charles, "b-b-but, d-d-damn him at a venture!" Nine hundred and ninety-nine times out of a thousand such rough justice would be right, but "Recorder," damning 905 out of 1029 is no dealer in rough justice, is no venturer, he knows. Has he not read 'em all, the wretches!

The situation is all the more alarming, when we consider his comments. Remember 905 bards are too insignificant to be called up for judgment, they are cast into outer dark, where, presumably, in the words of Kipling, they may weep that they be "too small to sin to the height of their desire." Of the 125 who are put into the dock, 36 are

acquitted, 63 are let off with a warning, and 26 condemned. Among the condemned are such hardened poetic criminals as Sir William Watson, John Drinkwater, W. W. Gibson, Robert Graves, Rudyard Kipling, Richard Le Gallienne, Alice Meynell, Richard Middleton, Alfred Noyes, Robert Nichols, Stephen Phillips, Cecil Roberts, Katherine Tynan and two of the Sitwells. Those let off with a beakly warning or whose case is indecisive, include Maurice Baring, Laurence Binyon, Rupert Brooke, John Freeman, Gerald Gould, Aldous Huxley, D. H. Lawrence, Edward Shanks, Sir Rabin-dranath Tagore and Sacheverell Sitwell. It is with relief, therefore, that we learn of the favourable verdicts found for Thomas Hardy, W. S. Blount, Ralph Hodgson, W. H. Davies, W. B. Yeats, Anna Wickham, Herbert Trench, James Stephens, Fredegond Shove, Siegfried Sassoon, Ezra Pound, Sir Henry Newbolt, T. Sturge Moore, Harold Monro, Rose Macaulay, John Masefield, Ford Madox

Hueffer, F. S. Flint, Æ, Charles M. Doughty, Walter de la Mare, T. W. H. Crosland, Robert Bridges, Lascelles Abercrombie, Gordon Bottomley, Michael Field and a few more. On the whole, the result is, to use a stock-word of "Recorder," interesting, and, in a way, gratifying, for there is such varied talent and genius in each group as to safeguard any but poets from heart-burnings. Which does not alter the seriousness of the situation. There can be but one conclusion: we are suffering from over-production in poetry, and Lord Northcliffe ought to be told about it. It is not enough to content oneself with a negative attitude. The Northcliffe Press, to give it its due, never encourages poets: the time has come when it should condemn them—"sack the lot!" as Lord Fisher would have said.

But "Recorder" proves more than the numerical danger of our poets and their overwhelming mediocrity; he proves the

futility of criticism. "Criticism," it has been remarked, "in the last resort is personal opinion." I agree, and it makes me smile when laboriously well-meaning folk act otherwise. "Recorder" might, but for the amusement he has afforded me, and the vexation he will have afforded others, have saved his breath to cool his porridge. But it matters little: time will have its way with bards without distinction or criticism. Anyone who has a wide experience of modern poetry, without agreeing with "Recorder" in details, must pray for a reduced output. What we want is quality, not quantity, in poetry as well as in other things. And the irony of the whole business lies in the fact that the publisher of this list of bards, a poet of distinction himself, owns and administers the Poetry Bookshop, which lives by the sale of poetry, largely modern. He has now published a document which seems to condemn as rubbish most of his hitherto legitimate goods. Will he close the Poetry Bookshop?

Apart from such high matters there is ample justification for "Recorder's" list, not as a list of poets, but as what is called a human document. You will remember that I tried to guess his reason for attempting so horrific a task, and you may also recall that I suggested Revenge. A closer examination does not alter this opinion. The best things in the pamphlet are its malicious tit-bits: the reference, for instance, to Mr. Maurice Baring as "a gentleman of social importance," and the ungracious and ungrateful remark that Sir William Watson is merely "a pompous poet left over from the last century." "Recorder" may be an admirable fellow, but, if I mistake not, he writes like a very ordinary puppy. I suspect the reference to Mr. Squire as a "popular poet" to be a malicious dig at a bard he is forced to praise, and "Uninspired versifying in the best convention, strongly influenced by Wordsworth, Masfield and others," is as stupid as it is spiteful as a description of the poetry of Mr. Cecil Roberts.

“Recorder’s” suspicion, however, that Mrs. Katherine Tynan “leaks poetry” is fair, though crude comment upon a poet who over-produces, and there is wisdom in the reference to Alfred Noyes as “a patriotic poet with none of the virtues of Sir Henry Newbolt.” He is unfair to Mrs. Meynell, but funny, her poetry is a long level road “on either side of which Soul and Body walk,” but they never meet out of fear of polluting one another. He is also unjust to Richard Le Gallienne and Rudyard Kipling, which is the sign of the high-brow which crowns the noodle. Both these poets have committed atrocities, but only the cheap prig finds them wholly bad. The cleverest comments are reserved for the brothers and sister Sitwell, whom “Recorder” must dislike as heartily as they must now dislike him, if they notice such trifles.

I shall conclude this paper by yielding to the temptation of quoting these three passages :

SITWELL, EDITH : While reading this

lady's work one feels as if in a gigantic conservatory lined with mirrors, electric lights blazing from every corner, tom-toms beating ceaselessly while thousands of parrots scream in unison and enormous cats slink after rats, festooning themselves among exotic plants. Jewelled snakes twine in and out, writhing their way up the balustrades. Meanwhile, one or two bishops discuss the weather with drunken clowns and the entire aristocracy looks on approvingly from a far corner. After reading one feels like a circus rider who has jumped through a paper hoop and is now drinking cold tea.

SITWELL, OSBERT: Various metaphors may be applied: A bag of conjuring tricks. A rattle without a handle. A beautiful set of toy teeth in a second-hand shop. Fireworks by daylight. A pin pricking a parachute.

SITWELL, SACHEVERELL: The most promising member of his family. There is depth and insight in his writing, but his

mind has the riotous instincts of his brother and sister.

On the whole, these are the best advertisements in the book. "Recorder's" contempt is more enticing than his praise—although he (she or it) has certainly praised the right poets.

August, 1920.

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